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FEATURE
UNDER THE INFLUENCE
How videogames have changed the world

RETRO
SNES
The world's greatest games console remembered

PREVIEWED
KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC
We reveal the Star Wars Universe as you've never seen it before

INTERVIEWED
SHIGERU MIYAMOTO
"I don't plan to create shockwaves – I'm always thinking about making perfect gameplay"

REVIEWS
RAYMAN 3 [XB/PS2/GC/GBA]
PRIDE FC [PS2]
THE MARK OF KRI [PS2]
SHINING SOUL [GBA]
TOCA RACE DRIVER [XB]
DEVIL MAY CRY 2 [PS2]
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TENCHU: WRATH OF HEAVEN [PS2]

180 PAGES – A GALAXY OF GAMING GREATNESS


eMag

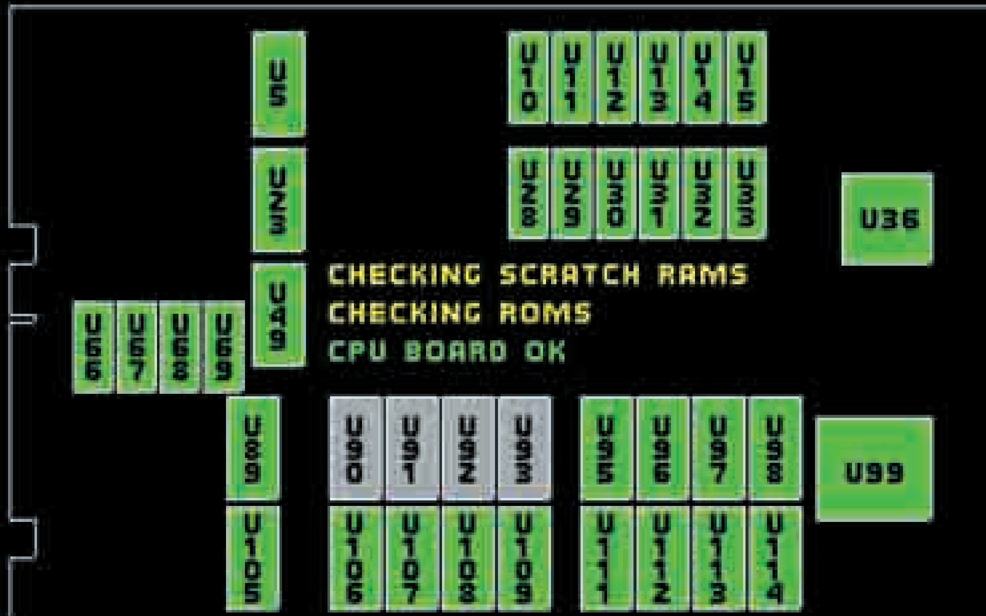
When Craig Houston walked into developer Genepool's offices to show off the game that he'd been producing, it was obvious that he was wired up – jittery but eager to please. It was clear that working on his current project had left him a little beaten up. "I had my first day off in eight months yesterday," he explained to anyone that was listening, "It was my son's birthday".

The assembled journos proffered the only sympathetic gesture they could – a warm can of Stella to slake his thirst. It was late morning but time had lost its meaning for Craig and 'luxuries' like beer or spending time with loved ones were distant memories.

For most, giving up normal life for extended periods would be unthinkable. Not if you happen to be involved with the development of a videogame. So next time you buy a game, spare a thought for the many people like Craig whose devotion to videogames has resulted in the games that are contained within this magazine.

This is a celebration of their work and the world of games.

Simon Phillips, Group Editor







NEWS

NEWS | INDUSTRY GOSSIP | OPINION

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FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS

Now you can pummel players around the world as online gaming takes off.

LAYING IT ON THE LINE

ONLINE CONSOLE GAMING IS HERE – BUT IS THE UK GETTING THE BURNT BITS OF THE BROADBAND CAKE?

Xbox Live has a varied range of launch titles.

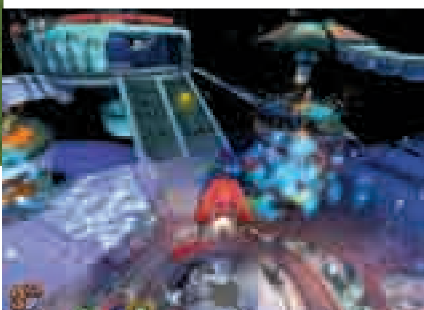
Hallelujah – the blessing that is online gaming is finally here, with more than just a Dreamcast-shaped puff of smoke to show for it. By the time you read this, the joys of Xbox Live and GameCube 'Also Live (But Only With *PSO*)' will be here, meaning you can finally go online with your console – as long as it's not black and made by Sony – and play something other than lag-crazy games like *Chu Chu Rocket!* or *Quake III Arena* on the Dreamcast.

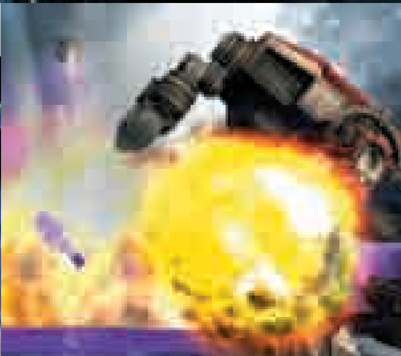
Of course, to enjoy playing your GameCube online to the best of its abilities (or even try to get onto Xbox Live), you'll need a broadband connection instead of a basic dial-up modem; if you don't already have it, the message from console firms is clearly 'sign up or get left behind' as everyone clambers to offer the best online gaming experience.

However, as with anything that sounds like the best thing since sliced bread, there's a hitch. There's little doubt that broadband is far better than



When the online-capable games arrive, will the UK's broadband service be up to scratch?





a dial-up modem for online gaming, but the problem here isn't really a question of quality – it's of timing, cost and public interest. The 'big three' are trying to make their online gaming experience the best there is, but considering that the UK is one of the least enthusiastic countries in Europe when it comes to broadband uptake, with prices among the highest in the world, can they succeed?

Consider the evidence. According to figures produced late last year, only nine per cent of Internet-enabled homes in the UK had a broadband connection, compared with an enormous (by comparison) 39 per cent in Germany. "Broadband is growing in this country," said Tom Ewing, Internet Analyst at Nielsen//NetRatings, "but the government's stated target of being the European leader in broadband connectivity by 2005 is absurd if you set it against current rates of growth. There are signs that the uptake is rising, but it'll take more than just advertising to catch up with markets in Germany."

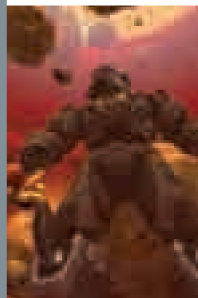
But if broadband is as good as it claims to be, why aren't people flocking to sign up? It may be because current prices for a broadband connection compatible with services like Xbox Live are still rather high; with charges starting at £29.99 a month from firms like BT and ntl, you're looking at some serious money. If you're starting from scratch, it gets even harder. Combine the basic costs of buying an Xbox (for instance), a game, a broadband connection (with a year's subscription as minimum) and an Xbox Live starter kit and you're looking at an initial cost of over £600, and that's without taking into account buying additional cables or routers if you need them.

What's worse is that the broadband service currently being offered isn't even proper broadband (which is delivered through fibre-optic cable, radio or satellite technology). Instead, what we have is a 'mid-band' ADSL system that runs through the current phone and cable system.

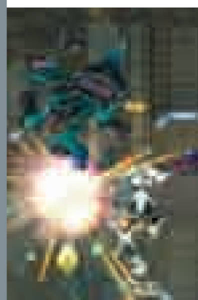
As it stands, there's some serious sock-pulling to be done by broadband providers – both in terms of price cutting and service quality – before things like Xbox Live can even hope to reach the potential it so richly deserves. So, have the Xbox and GameCube jumped the gun and tried to provide a service to a market that barely exists? Only time will tell...



Tony Hawk's 4 has already enjoyed online success in the US on PlayStation2.



Xbox Live is the most promising online console venture at the moment.



Phantasy Star Online is currently the GameCube's only online title.

ONLINE CONSOLES: WHO'S DOING WHAT?

PLAYSTATION2 – BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

Considering some of the high-profile titles Sony's brewing for the PlayStation2's online ventures over here, it's a wonder that they haven't done more to rain on Microsoft's parade. Games like *Tony Hawk's 4* (only online on PS2, incidentally) and *SOCOM* have been causing quite a stir in the US for some time, with *Auto Modellista* and *Everquest* set to continue the trend. Meanwhile in the UK, Sony's plans should have been announced just before you read this. We don't doubt for a second that whatever is planned will prove successful – Sony has enough clout to get some of the biggest developers on its side. In fact, it has taken the ingenious step of not charging developers a licence fee to create online PS2 titles (for a limited time only). This should encourage companies to put out more online titles and, provided this doesn't lead to an influx of rushed, poor-quality titles, this could be a very smart move.

XBOX – LIVE AND KICKING

Feedback from beta testers about Xbox Live has been favourable, but the real test will come when the whole country is able to pick up the Starter Pack and get online. The six game launch line-up is respectable enough, but we can't really see anything other than *Unreal Championship* and *Moto GP* holding gamers' attention for long. That said, the launch games do cater for most tastes which is a step in the right direction. Xbox Live is technically the best thought-out and implemented online service at the moment, making it simple for gamers to challenge each other or update game elements, but this is very open to abuse. Already, *Unreal* has received a downloadable patch which leaves us with visions of PC gaming where products are often released flawed then patched later. Provided the Xbox doesn't head too far down this road, we're extremely excited by the promise Live is showing even at this early stage.

GAMECUBE – QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

The only title currently flying the GameCube flag online is SEGA's *Phantasy Star Online Episodes 1&2*. While many will take some convincing to splash out on a Hunter's Licence (or subscription fee, if you want to be picky), the fact that the Dreamcast servers were taken down last month should help convince some addicts to upgrade. After that, further titles are anyone's guess until at least E3. Speculation is rife that many of Nintendo's future in-house developments will boast a *World Smash* header and fully support online play. These would include *Pikmin 2*, *Mario Kart* and the new *Pokémon* title. Obviously, these remain entirely unconfirmed but titles like this would undoubtedly see many 'Cubers invest in the appropriate kit to take on the world. Add to this whatever third-party support others may choose to bring and the GameCube's online potential may yet silence critics of Nintendo's slower approach.

Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



IT'S ALL GREEK TO US

If you're planning a holiday to Greece this year, watch out – not only is it likely to be hot, but the Greek government still hasn't backed down on its law banning electronic gaming in public. The law, which the EU has criticised, no longer forbids the playing of certain games (like handhelds) in public as it did last year. However, using any kind of gambling machine or even playing online at an Internet café could still land you in hot water – or jail with a large fine, if there's no hot water available. Just don't say we didn't warn you…





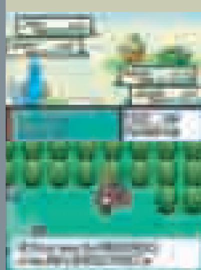
MMM, SPECIAL PROJECT

We all knew it would happen – the Game Boy Advance SP (Nintendo's upgraded GBA) sold out in one day when it hit Japanese shelves last month. With the limited edition *Final Fantasy Tactics*/Pearl White GBA SP being the bestseller – and the silver unit not far behind – it's clear that Japanese gamers are still besotted with the Nintendo handheld. But we're not sure if the same thing will happen when it comes out over here.





Pokémon should keep the GBA's head about water.



The GBA SP may attract a new audience for the handheld.



DOES NINTENDO HAVE MORE TROUBLE BREWING THAN IT'S LETTING ON?

WE'LL HAVE NO TROUBLE HERE



Link may well turn out to be Nintendo's hero if he can save the GameCube.

Even if you're a relative newcomer to videogames, you'll most likely be familiar with the whole SEGA fiasco that we had to endure in 2001. At the time, all the claims made about SEGA dropping the Dreamcast and becoming a third-party developer were fervently denied by the company – until they turned out to be true just a few months later, proving that hindsight really is worth its weight in gold. So with that in mind, we have to turn our gaze in the direction of Kyoto, Japan and ask the question: could Nintendo be setting itself up for a similar fall?

There's no question that with companies like SEGA and Atari, Nintendo practically laid the foundations of the games industry. Of course, it's always had a reputation that it's found difficult to shake, despite recent attempts to make changes to keep up with Sony and now Microsoft.

Thanks mainly to the belief that Nintendo still makes games aimed at kids rather than gamers of all ages, the GameCube has had a tough time finding a firm footing within the games market – even in its home territory of Japan where, at the time of going to press, the Xbox is actually outselling the GameCube.

Unfortunately, with the increasing number of people who wouldn't normally be into games picking up consoles based purely on the number of games available and the machine's popularity, analysts believe that this image isn't just going to disappear overnight.

"Nintendo is missing out on the current generation of games players," says David Mercer, VP of the Strategy Analytics Global Broadband Practice. "Culturally, it will be difficult for the company to change course but it must do so in order to secure its long-term position as a leading games publisher." So, the message to Nintendo from financial analysts about making hardware is 'get out while the going isn't that good' – not exactly something the company will want to

"THEY MAY BE GOOD FOR GAME USERS BUT WHEN IT COMES TO UNIQUE INTERACTION WITH THE HARDWARE, I DON'T THINK CROSS PLATFORM GAMES CONTRIBUTE A LOT"
SHIGERU MIYAMOTO, NINTENDO





The mighty *Metroid Prime* will undoubtedly help to shift a few GameCubes on its UK release.

hear when its plans for a follow-up to the GameCube are already in motion.

On top of all this, there's the issue of third-party support – disappointing sales in recent months (which are being attributed to the GameCube's lack of popularity, rather than the quality of the games) have led to companies like Activision, THQ and even EA pulling their upcoming cross-platform titles from the GameCube release schedule, creating a lack of confidence in the console across the publishing board.

There's also the firm's hesitant stance on online gaming. While Nintendo's reluctance to take the GameCube online this early might make business sense, the sudden rush for everyone to get their consoles online means it might get left behind if the GameCube doesn't follow suit – even though the argument that online gaming is the future of videogames looks slightly flimsy, in the UK at least.

However, if all this has got you reaching for the razorblades then stay your hand; it might look bleak, but all is not lost. In fact, according to a report recently released by DFC Intelligence covering market leaders in the videogame industry, Nintendo has more than enough stockpiled cash to keep its head above water for many years to come.

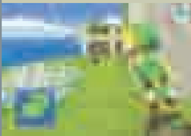
While there's certainly evidence that it hasn't managed to grow significantly as a company over the last decade, Nintendo has always been profitable thanks to the Game Boy's constant popularity, the continuing success of its first-party titles and (most obviously) those damned Pokémon creatures. Combine this with the early sidelining of failed hardware like the Virtual Boy and the Pokémon Mini – both dropped to save money, as well as face to some extent – and it looks as though Nintendo does have some business sense after all.

Despite all the rumours floating around at the moment about the company's strife, one thing is for sure – Nintendo does know what it's doing. Certainly, it's not likely to be making a play for Sony's crown any time soon, but with such a strong first-party line-up set for the next year, it's difficult to see Nintendo struggling in the near future. To be honest, it's just up to anti-GameCube zealots to open their eyes and see what they're missing out on. But then we doubt that'll happen before the next-next-gen.

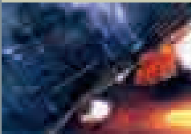
COMING SOON

If you think that there's a drought of games on the GameCube, you really haven't been paying all that much attention…

Zelda: The Wind Waker
Nintendo's big game of the spring sees Link return in an absolutely gorgeous yet opinion-dividing form – expect this game to sell GameCubes like the warmest of cake-like products. Tasty.



F-Zero GC
Mmm, blindingly fast racing. We're already on tenterhooks at the prospect of playing this for more than five minutes (damn you, World Hobby Fair) when Nintendo releases it in May over in Japan.



Pikmin 2
Captain Olimar's back, and this time he's got a mate. Otherwise, it looks like business as usual for the slave-like Pikmin as they lift, carry and generally grow like the happy little flower people that they are.



Mario 128
Also promised before the end of the year (in Japan, at least), it's slightly odd that Nintendo have yet to release a single piece of information about Mario's next game. E3 can't come soon enough…



Mario Kart Online
Recent comments from Miyamoto-san have revealed that he's no longer troubled at the prospect of taking the *Mario Kart* series online. Plus it'll be revealed at E3. Ooh, how exciting.



BREAKING UP IS HARD TO DO

… AND GETTING TOGETHER MAKES YOUR SHARE PRICE DROP

Honestly, games developers and publishers these days – they pair off and split up more often than even the most sexually prolific A-list celebrities. This month's new coupling sees SEGA getting all snuggly with Sammy, a giant in the, er, pachinko business (pachinko is a bit like an upright version of pinball and very popular in Japan). Both companies were said to be pleased with the deal. Hajime Satomi, president of Sammy, said: "By combining Sammy's high growth power in pachinko game systems and SEGA's strength in software development and in the arcade business, we can create a globally known, comprehensive entertainment firm." Satomi is set to lead the new entity when the merger is finalised in October. Unfortunately, SEGA lost eight and a half points from its share price almost immediately after the merger announcement – an indication that not everyone shared their delight.

Just as one pair of companies get it together, so another partnership fizzles out. Electronic Arts and Square will no longer act on behalf of each other in their own territories. EA will stop distributing Square titles in the US, while Square won't be handling EA's games in Japan. In place of this almost leech-like relationship, the first fruits of Square's merger with Enix will emerge; a new branch of the company – Square Enix USA Inc. – is to be established under new president Jun Iwasaki.



Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



CACK NO MORE

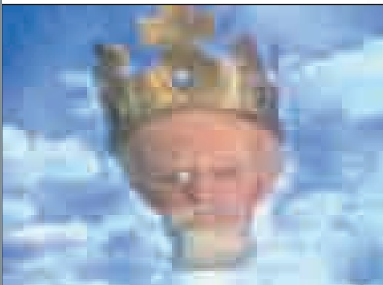
Last month's issue of games™ featured a review of *Kakuto Chojin* – an atrocity of a beat-'em-up that managed to scrape a poxy two out of ten. Wondering why you haven't seen it landing on shelves across the country? That's probably because Microsoft had the sense to cancel the game's release in the UK and pull the game from stores across the rest of the world too. Officially, it had something to do with religious concerns (the Koran was being read out loud on one stage) but we doubt this was the only reason for the game being cancelled…





DIAMOND GEEZER

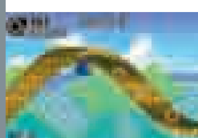
Normally, we're not in the habit of promoting online petitions (because they don't usually achieve much) but when they're for such a good cause… well, we can't resist. This month's 'sign me, please' request comes from www.gamesmastertv.co.uk, demanding the return of their favourite Dominik Diamond-hosted videogames TV show. Being an Internet petition the chances of success might seem slim, but even Hewland International (the company behind the show) has said it might happen if enough people show their support. Ace.



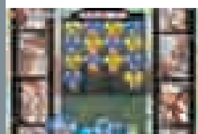


NOKIA FLEXES ITS GAMING MUSCLES WITH THE N-GAGE

N-GAGING CONVERSATION



Sonic will be speeding onto Nokia's N-Gage in a move that could spell trouble for the Game Boy Advance…



Bubble-popper *Bust-A-Move* will also be appearing, guaranteeing hours of fun on buses, trains, lavatories, etc.

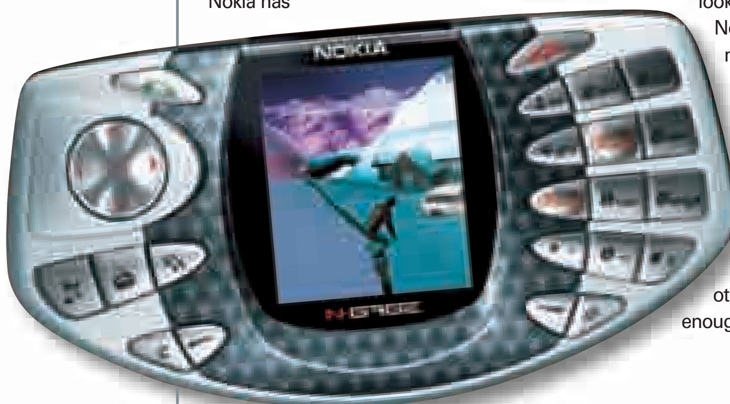


Even Lara Croft is lending her talents to promoting the new hardware, with *Tomb Raider* confirmed as a launch title.

Not satisfied with owning a fair old chunk of the mobile phone industry, Nokia has now firmly trained its sights on dismantling Nintendo's monopoly of the handheld gaming market with its new piece of gadgetry, the N-Gage (or Nokia N-Gage Mobile Game Deck, if you're a fan of long-winded names). Of course, if gaming on your mobile phone only means *Snake* or *Concentration* to you, get ready for a shock; from what we've seen, this is a long way ahead of anything around at the moment.

The N-Gage (which we first mentioned back in issue 1) still has the functionality of a mobile phone, but rather than being a phone with gaming functions, Nokia has promised that the N-Gage is a gaming unit first and everything else second. Yes, you can use it to phone your friends and send text messages; heck, it even has a built-in stereo FM radio and MP3 music player much like the older Nokia 5510. But ultimately, the N-Gage is a handheld gaming machine and, going on the support Nokia has lined up for the unit, it looks like the Finnish company means business. By convincing developers like SEGA, Eidos, Activision, THQ and Taito to sign on the dotted line, the N-Gage has already earned itself a stack of impressive launch titles such as *Sonic N*, *SEGA Rally*, *Bust-A-Move*, *Virtua Tennis* and even *Tomb Raider*. What's more, Nokia reckons that porting PSone games to the N-Gage won't be too difficult – something that no doubt appeals to firms with an already massive back catalogue of titles. With all this and the use of Bluetooth link technology to enable wireless multiplayer gaming, the N-Gage really does start to look like an appealing piece of hardware.

Of course, the question you need to ask yourself is that with Nintendo currently owning the lion's share of the handheld gaming market, does Nokia stand any chance? Perhaps. After all, we should remember that people said exactly the same thing about Sony before it entered the console market and look where it is now. Seeing as how Nokia has a similar kind of marketing clout to that of Sony, there might be cause for concern in the Nintendo camp, so long as the N-Gage doesn't wind up being too pricey. With the GBA SP launch almost upon us, it's pretty obvious that Nintendo's updated handheld is planned as a pre-emptive strike against other rival handhelds, but will it be enough to hold off the enemy?





MICROSOFT'S BIG BLACK BOX CELEBRATES TWELVE MONTHS ON THE MARKET

I AM ONE

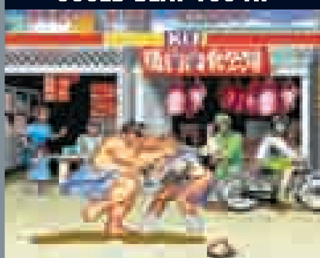
You didn't think it would make it, did you? You wouldn't be alone, either. Mere months after the Xbox's release last March, critics were already singing songs of doom and gloom about the world's chunkiest console. Now though, the story is a little different since the Xbox has introduced several interesting new franchises, brought a few older ones up to date in style and hammered home the message that no matter how ugly it may be, it's what's inside that really counts – profoundly touching, we're sure you'll agree.

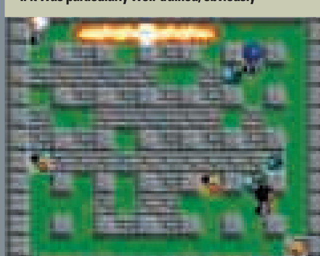
One of the high points of this period must surely be the Xbox outselling the GameCube in Japan, a notoriously anti-X territory. Sure, this may only have been a single week on the strength of one game (*DOA Extreme Beach Volleyball,* no less) and by a minimal margin, but it's still something nobody would have predicted a year ago. But what events will we be celebrating this time next year?

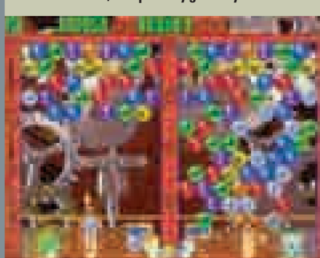
By the Xbox's second anniversary we should all be looking back on a year of online goodness courtesy of Xbox Live. We'll no doubt also be singing the praises of a good few dark horses (the Xbox seems to attract these – *Phantom Crash* and *Amped*, for instance, came out of nowhere) and still looking forward to *Halo 2* and *Fable*, both of which will have mysteriously slipped. Come on – you don't really expect them before the end of the year, do you?

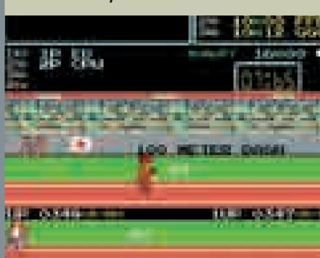

Will we be enjoying *Halo 2* by this time next year? It'd be nice. But perhaps unlikely.

games™ THE TOP FIVE
GAMES A TRAINED MONKEY COULD BEAT YOU AT

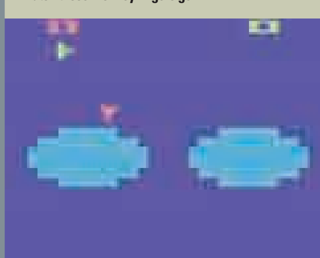

No.5 STREET FIGHTER II
If it was particularly well-trained, obviously


No.4 SUPER BOMBERMAN
You never know, he'll probably get lucky


No.3 BUST-A-MOVE
Because monkeys aren't colour blind



No.2 TRACK AND FIELD
Watch those monkey fingers go


No.1 COMBAT
Even if it was blind with one arm



INSERT COIN TO CONTINUE

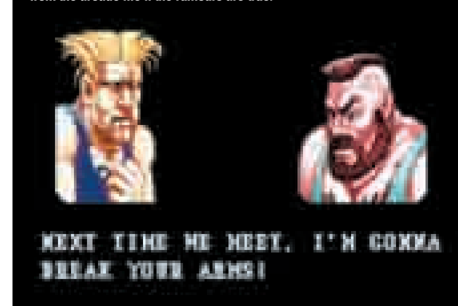
CAPCOM TO PULL OUT OF THE ARCADE

If initial reports from the recent Amusement Operators' Union (AOU) show in Japan prove true, Capcom could cause one of the biggest arcade shocks in recent years. Having been behind some of the real coin-op classics (*Street Fighter II*, anyone? *Final Fight*, perhaps?), *Capcom Fighting All-Stars* may be the company's final foray in the cabinet market, and rumour has it that even that may not get made. Capcom hasn't, however, ruled out the possibility of further joint ventures so 'Capcom' may not be a word entirely lost in the arcade world.

Official confirmation hasn't been announced but the decision apparently comes on the back of the drop in the popularity of arcades. Longer development times and higher costs have already forced numerous firms out of the industry altogether, but Capcom looks to be merely switching its focus to the home systems.

While this is a notable event, we can't say we're entirely surprised – these days, the most popular machines in arcades tend to be those that offer an experience that can't be fully replicated at home. Oversized replica firearms and ear-splitting exercise cabinets aren't exactly Capcom's strong point and even the best 'traditional' games have struggled next to these larger-than-life experiences. Besides, if it means we'll see Capcom's home line-up go from strength to strength, we can't see many people having cause to complain.

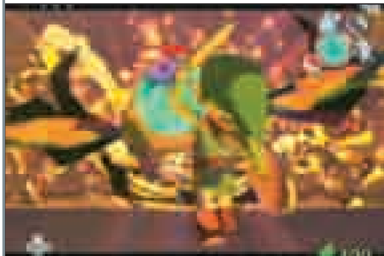
It looks like Guile and friends are retiring from the arcade life if the rumours are true.

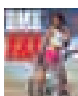


Data stream
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



LE FOR UK, A-OK
What's this? Nintendo doing something nice for gamers outside Japan and the US? It looks like it, if the recent announcement of a bonus disc for *Zelda: The Wind Waker* is anything to go by. Not only will the disc contain GameCube versions of *Ocarina Of Time* and *Master Quest* (along with video clips of upcoming titles like *F-Zero* and *1080° Avalanche*) but it'll also come as a limited edition two-disc box set, meaning you won't have to pre-order to get it. Blimey. Next you'll be telling us Nintendo appreciates the European market…





PORN-AGAIN CHRISTIAN
Never mind the fact that *BMX XXX* didn't exactly fly off the shelves – now it looks as though the 'humorous' extreme sports game could cost Acclaim more than they thought. BMX maestro Dave Mirra has decided to sue the publisher for $21 million over the use of his name and image to promote the product, citing outrage over Acclaim's decision to make the game more sexually explicit than he'd originally thought it would be.

THE RACE IS ON

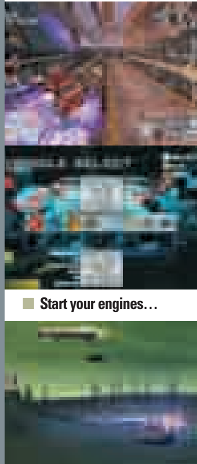
THE SOUND BARRIER IS NO LONGER SAFE…

With the buzz currently surrounding the new *F-Zero* title in Japan, it's hardly surprising that everybody wants a piece of the futuristic racing pie. Aside from the Nintendo/SEGA project, the two other contenders lining up on the 'space grid' (or whatever they call it) are NEC's *Tube Slider* and Acclaim's *XGRA*, a follow-up to the much-underrated *Extreme G3*. All are scheduled to arrive in the not-so-distant future – *F-Zero* hits Japan in May and the US a month later, *Tube Slider* still boasts a Q1 date (not long left now) while *XGRA* more realistically will launch in September across all three major formats.

These three will be keeping the genre alive for console gamers, but the mighty *F-Zero* will also be heading for arcades the world over. The pneumatic cabinet was officially unveiled at the recent AOU show to a rapturous welcome – it may not be the spinning *R360*-type cabinet that the world was hoping for but the seat movements seem more than ample to give a sense of involvement.

Also of note is the steering wheel, which almost functions like a flight controller too as you pull out and push in the wheel to alter the angle of the vehicle's nose. Add to this the system-link capabilities and memory card transfer potential from the GameCube version and you've got quite a package on your hands.

It's been a busy month elsewhere in the future too, with *Quantum Redshift* developer Curly Monsters announcing that it would be closing its doors. This is a real shame, especially considering that the sequel that was in the works was apparently being programmed to support Xbox Live as well as addressing the few issues people had with the original. Nevertheless, the mach speed race for supremacy continues and while we won't have a sure-fire winner until every competitor finishes, we've got a sneaking suspicion that SEGA and Nintendo working together is a sign of very good things indeed…


Start your engines…

THE WIT AND WISDOM OF PETER MOLYNEUX
"HE'S ALWAYS GOT SOMETHING TO SAY!"



PETER ON GC COLLABORATION, UNITY:

"To be working with Jeff Minter is a huge honour and I'm sure we'll be producing a game that's amazing and unique"

Translation: "It's Populous with llamas and we're hoping that nobody notices"

MORE FROM PETER NEXT MONTH!

HORI'S DIGITAL GAMECUBE CONTROLLER PROVIDES A LINK TO THE PAST

STREET FIGHTING MEN



Admit it, you're looking forward to playing *Soul Calibur II* but not to using the GameCube controller to do so, right? You're not alone, as anyone who tried to play *Capcom Vs SNK 2: EO* with the bulbous device would surely agree.

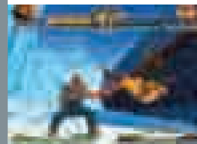
Rejoice then, for Hori – the little-known Eastern peripheral manufacturer – will have just unleashed its new digital 'Cube controller on Japan as you read this.

Primarily designed for use with the GBA Player, the pad strongly resembles that of the Super Nintendo controller (although it has the GameCube's button layout) and as such will come as a godsend for those caught between an analogue control stick and the world's smallest D-pad on the existing handset. On top of functionality to die for, Hori has also gone for affordability, with the pad clocking in at just ¥1500 (about £8).

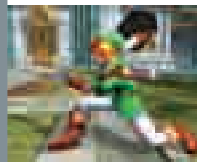
There's no word yet on whether this fine piece of value hardware will reach UK stores but many importers are already taking orders and will be glad to part you from your cash.

Just imagine using one of these to play *A Link To The Past* through the GBA Player – it'll be like owning your very own SNES. Hang on a second…

Even controllers are into retro action now.



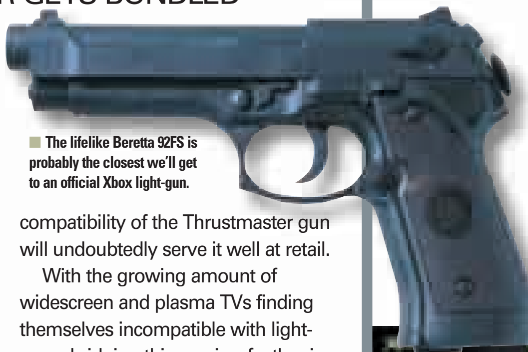
Those combos will be easier to pull off…



…and *Zelda* will feel positively old-school.

BRING OUT YOUR DEAD

SEGA'S ZOMBIE SHOOTER GETS BUNDLED



The lifelike Beretta 92FS is probably the closest we'll get to an official Xbox light-gun.

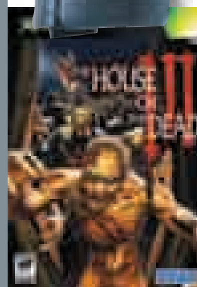
After a lot of uncertainty as to which Xbox light-gun would get Microsoft's official seal of approval, it looks as though this new bundle deal with Thrustmaster may put it beyond all doubt. The Beretta 92FS light-gun's launch will coincide with the release of *The House Of The Dead III*. The game and the gun will be available in a bundle, although the gun can be bought separately.

Having been developed in association with Infogrames, it looks as though this peripheral will be as close to an official release as we'll see. The gun is modelled on a real Beretta (a sign of changing times – this would never have been permitted several years ago) but this isn't its main selling point – the gun is among the first to be compatible with 100Hz televisions.

What's interesting to note is that the Mad Katz gun is the 'standard' in the US; even *HOTD3*'s official American website points you in the direction of the bright green Mad Katz gun, but we have to say that the added compatibility of the Thrustmaster gun will undoubtedly serve it well at retail.

With the growing amount of widescreen and plasma TVs finding themselves incompatible with light-guns, bridging this gap is a feather in the cap of Thrustmaster. An unlikely source, though – a quick scan of its catalogue causes *Metal Gear*-style question marks to appear over our heads. An Xbox flight stick? The accursed *FIFA* mat that must have been designed to make sports games unplayable?

Even skate/snowboard controllers leave us wondering why they even bothered. But credit where credit's due – they now produce one of the most functional Xbox light guns on the market and should be congratulated.



HOTD3 will benefit from this new Xbox gadgetry.

GAMES ROOM 101

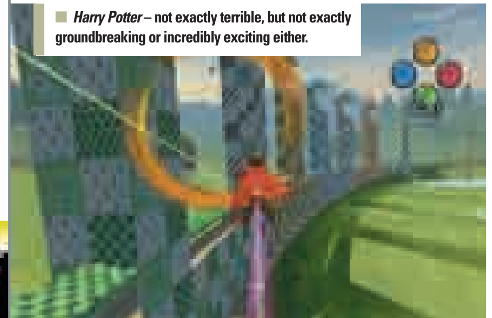
THINGS WE HATE ABOUT VIDEOGAMES

NO.4: A LICENCE TO PRINT MONEY

Fact: all licensed games are arse. Well, most of them anyway – after all, *GoldenEye* was great so we have to make an exception there. Still, for every good licensed game sailing confidently through the sea of mediocrity (such as *GoldenEye* and, er, that's it), there's a lifeboat full of bad ones drifting aimlessly behind it. Whether it's a game based on a movie, cartoon, TV show or anything else that has even the remotest possibility of being licensed, it's likely to be awful unless there's some kind of miracle during the development process.

And the shameful thing is, people actually buy them – even if they get terrible reviews across the board. Do people not take note of what people who get paid to play games have to say? Heck, look at the GameCube Top Ten sales chart; *Minority Report* is currently hovering near the bottom and that's a real stinker of a movie tie-in videogame. Of course, that's not because it was created by an incapable developer – it's because the game stuck to the same 'tried and tested' formula that virtually all film-to-game conversions have done in the past, all of which have turned out to be utter tripe.

Damn the ever regurgitating innards of the corporate games industry – damn them to hell.



Harry Potter – not exactly terrible, but not exactly groundbreaking or incredibly exciting either.



We've already got our doubts about *Enter The Matrix*…

Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING

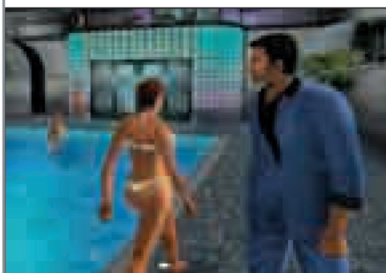
SEGA SPOILSPORTS

So, is SEGA really prioritising its GameCube product range or perhaps EA's sports titles beat SEGA's at retail? Either way, the result is the same – SEGA has announced the cancellation of all SEGA Sports games on the 'Cube after the *2K3* series. "SEGA's entertainment properties have sold extremely well on GameCube," said SEGA's statement, "and as a result, we are placing priority and focusing our resources on delivering those titles to the platform moving forward." No sport and more *Sonic* then – probably a sensible move, but not necessarily a popular one.



GTA: PORT CITY

After massive success on the PS2, Rockstar has 'surprisingly' unveiled the ported PC version of *GTA: Vice City* which is due to be released on 16 May in the UK, much to the delight of PC owners. "We are truly humbled by the response that the game has received so far," said Sam Houser, president of Rockstar Games, "and are extremely excited to showcase *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* on the PC." Now, is that excited as in 'glad to be giving gamers what they want' or excited as in 'rubbing hands with glee at the prospect of even more profit'?





THE MYTH FINALLY BECOMES REALITY

ACCESS ALL AREAS

Unbelievably, not only is the FreeLoader out now but the thing actually works. Several months ago, Datel's import-playing device was a bit of a joke. Plagued with development woes, many thought that it simply couldn't be done and that the disc would never actually come to be. The release date slipped so many times that we could never get particularly worked up about its impending arrival. So we won't pretend we weren't surprised when it actually turned up.

But does it do a successful job of allowing importers to run their games on any GameCube? Surprisingly, it does. Despite allegations of many games running badly or not working at all, we can only assume that this was with an early version of the disc. FreeLoader V1.06B (the version we used) successfully ran everything we tried bar a few minor sound hiccups. Even the alleged 'problem game' *Resident Evil Zero* ran perfectly – no sign of the reported blue fire, slowdown or black and white hitches.

It has been suggested that while this version of the disc will run 99 per cent of current GameCube games, it may not run some future titles. Like the mod-chip protected PSone games and later N64 titles, developers may begin to code their games to stop the FreeLoader working. Datel's MD, Mike Connors, told us: "FreeLoader is a constantly evolving product and we're confident we can deal with any problems that future titles may throw up." But while it may not be future-proof, the FreeLoader is a godsend for importer gamers and the impatient alike.









RIDDING GAMERS OF THE SHAME OF OWNING LAME GAMES…

Over the last few months, the games™ trash compacter has been working overtime – especially as some of you have sent us games we're not even asking for, some of which aren't even that bad. Still, that isn't going to stop us from trying to rid the world of the games that not only offer an awful gaming experience, but try to unravel the very fabric of gaming society as well.

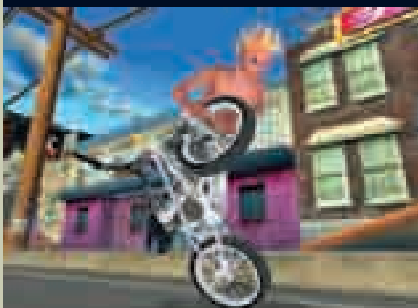
This issue, it's the turn of one of the only games to give ladies showing their breasts while riding bikes a bad name – *BMX XXX*. Seeing as how Dave Mirra's taken a bit of an exception to the game, we thought we would too; the only difference is that we're not expecting to make $21 million out of it. If only it was that easy…



So, bought *BMX XXX* on the basis that it had tits in it? It's okay – there's no shame in it, although you could have saved £37 by buying a dirty magazine instead. All you have to do is pop it in a brown padded envelope and send it to us at:

Yes, I Am A Dirty Perv
games™
Paragon Publishing
Paragon House
St Peter's Road
Bournemouth
Dorset, BH1 2JS

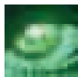
Shocking. It gives naked ladies a bad name…




eMag

Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



BUT IS IT ART?

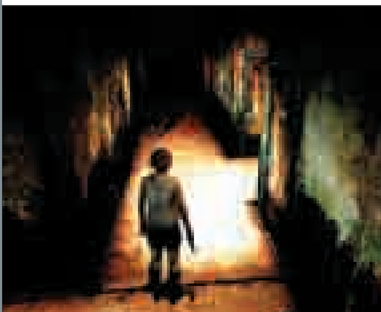
It's not quite as brazen as paying people to change their names, but Sony seems to have come up with a great way of advertising its rather disappointing *Primal* – it's having an art exhibition. On at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts from 6-9 April, the exhibition (entitled Primal Art) will be "an innovative peek into the world of contemporary art and the cultural appeal of videogames" with several related seminars also being held. Nice idea – shame about the game, eh?

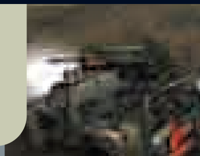




ALL GONE QUIET OVER THERE

Well, there's a shock – in a month where it looks like Japanese developers are finally starting to take a shine to the European market, it seems as though Konami has jumped on the bandwagon too. Why? Because it has recently announced that *Silent Hill 3* (the latest instalment of its scarier-than-*Resident Evil* series) will be released in Europe first, with the US and Japanese releases trailing behind sometime afterwards. Oh, how we laughed…





Bam! Entertainment is suffering losses at the moment. But it's not alone…

IT'S NOT ALL FUN AND GAMES…

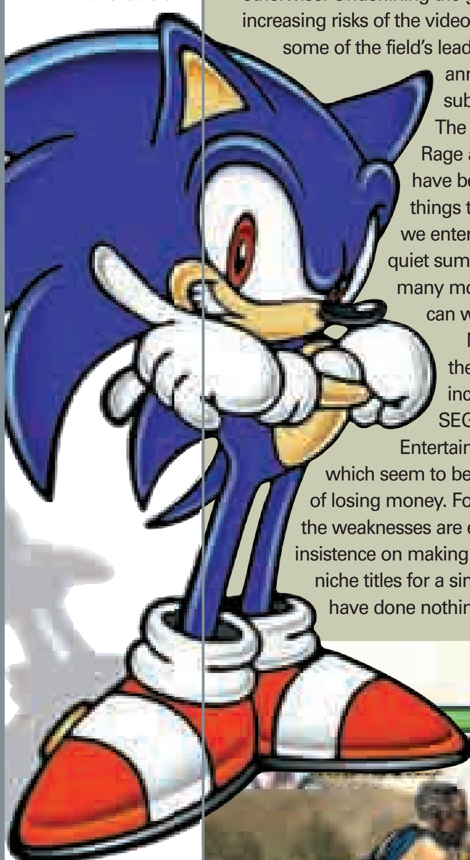
SEEING RED

Common sense would dictate that developers and publishers that put famous brands into thousands of homes wouldn't struggle to make money. Unfortunately, several companies have recently done a grand job of proving otherwise. Underlining the growing costs and increasing risks of the videogame industry, some of the field's leading names have announced substantial losses. The recent demise of Rage and Crawfish may have been a sign of things to come and as we enter the notoriously quiet summer period, how many more companies can we expect to lose?

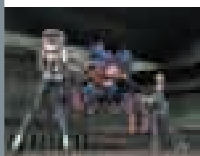
New arrivals on the downward spiral include Midway, SEGA and Bam! Entertainment, all of which seem to be making a habit of losing money. For several of these, the weaknesses are evident; SEGA's insistence on making so many of its niche titles for a single format can have done nothing for its bigger sales picture, and in the case of Bam!, the blame can be almost entirely attributed to a lacklustre catalogue, most of which was grilled at review.

Midway announced some of the biggest losses though; in the final quarter of last year the company lost some $25 million (around £15 million), much of which is being put down to the poor performance of titles like *Defender* and *Dr Muto* in the US. Admittedly, some of this will have been recouped over the last few months thanks to *Mortal Kombat*'s healthy performance in Europe but it's still quite a blow for a company of its history and stature.

We can't see SEGA staying down for long either – the Japanese giant should have quite a year ahead of it with excellent titles both new and old across every format available, and openly supporting Nokia's N-Gage unit even at this early stage. Involvement in a few key projects such as mobile gaming and, of course, *F-Zero AC/GC* may very well make or break the company over the next few years. But for this firm at least, the future looks fairly bright. With the cash pouring out of Midway and Bam! selling studios and laying off staff to keep its head above water, the same may not be true of these troubled developers if current trends continue.



SEGA looks best-placed to weather the current financial storm.

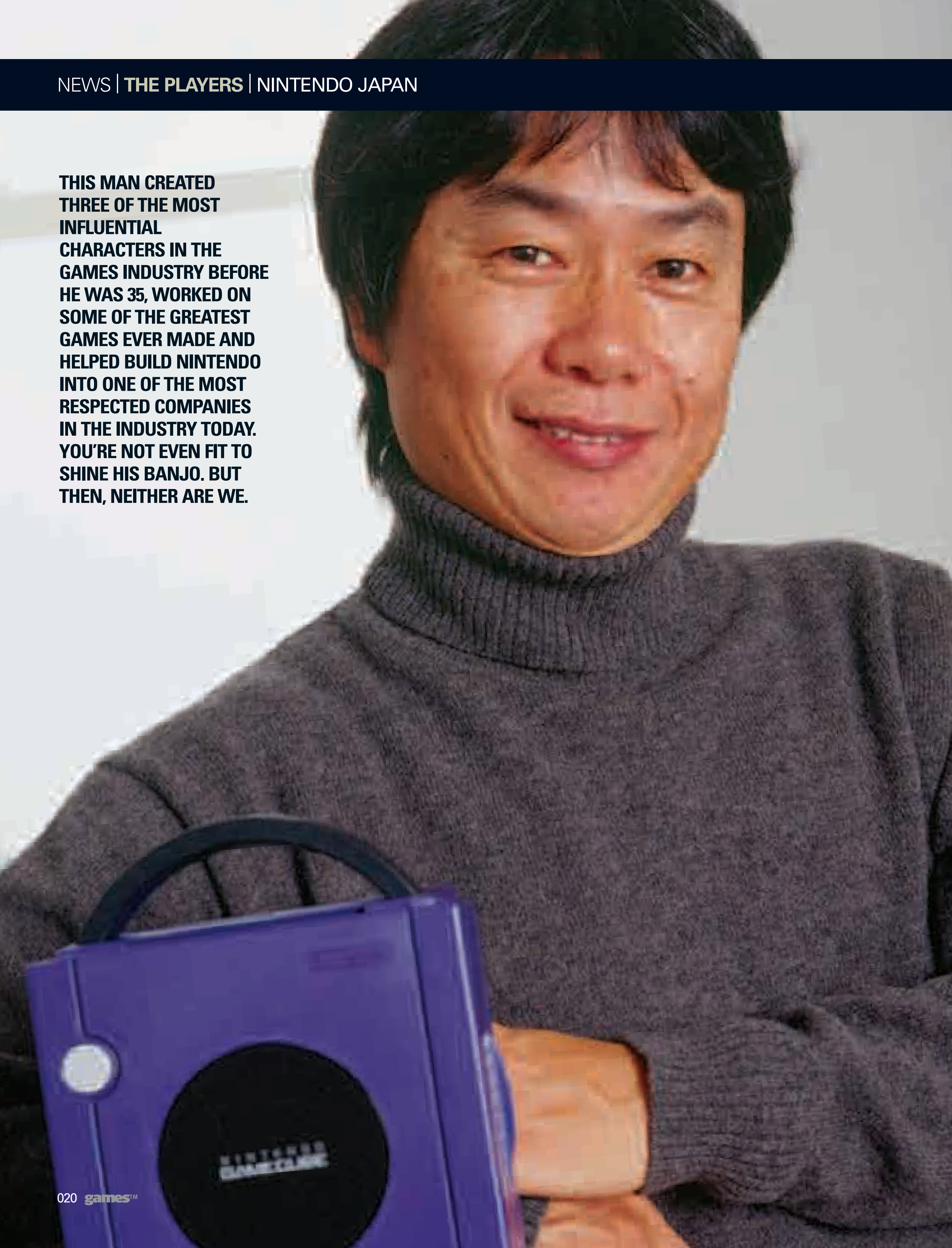




Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance may help revive Midway's flagging fortunes.




eMag



THIS MAN CREATED THREE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL CHARACTERS IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY BEFORE HE WAS 35, WORKED ON SOME OF THE GREATEST GAMES EVER MADE AND HELPED BUILD NINTENDO INTO ONE OF THE MOST RESPECTED COMPANIES IN THE INDUSTRY TODAY. YOU'RE NOT EVEN FIT TO SHINE HIS BANJO. BUT THEN, NEITHER ARE WE.

"MANY DEVELOPERS FOCUS ON CREATING BETTER GRAPHICS – I REALLY WANTED TO MAKE USE OF THE TECHNOLOGY TO ADVANCE THE AREAS NO-ONE ELSE THINKS ABOUT"
SHIGERU MIYAMOTO

SHIGERU MIYAMOTO
NINTENDO JAPAN

When it comes to the man who's done more for the games industry than most of its employees combined, the last thing you'd expect him to be is modest. Confident, yes – maybe even a little excitable when asked to go into detail about the subjects he feels most passionately about, but not modest. That's why talking to Miyamoto-san is so refreshing. To him, he's just a normal man doing a normal job – albeit one that makes millions of people happy every time he does it.

"I never intended to cause any shockwaves," insists Miyamoto-san when confronted with the fact that his upcoming game, *Zelda: The Wind Waker*, had gamers up in arms over the cel-shaded look, "but I'm always trying to make something new. Of course, it's best to be consistent but with *Wind Waker*, when I was creating the new Link, I was confronted with problems about taking him forward that I was a little uncomfortable with.

"Obviously, if Link was realistic then when he was walking, for example, he would be expected to travel so far with each step – however, the game would feel unnatural as Link's movement wouldn't relate to the gameplay very well. This is basically the argument I had while trying to form Link into his current shape. Like I said, I don't plan to create shockwaves – I'm just always thinking about making perfect gameplay."

Is Miyamoto-san being entirely truthful about not wanting to create shockwaves? Depends if you believe the adage that there's no such thing as bad press ("If there's a negative opinion, at least people are talking about the game, which is better than no-one talking about it," says Miyamoto-san, somewhat grudgingly). Still, the idea of 'evolution, not revolution' seems to be quite high on Nintendo's list of priorities at the moment. With *Super Mario Sunshine* being strikingly similar to *Super Mario 64* and *Zelda: The Wind Waker* certainly taking more than a few ideas from *Ocarina Of Time*, more cynical gamers out there may feel that Miyamoto-san is running out of ideas. Not surprisingly, the man himself isn't quite ready to put himself (or his beloved characters) out to pasture just yet.

"A lack of ideas isn't a concern," Miyamoto-san says. "However, Nintendo has a lot of important franchises and at the moment most of our team is occupied with creating sequels to those franchises, which is kind of troublesome. The good news is that new people are growing fast, which means I can trust them to work on the latest games.

"Unfortunately, with a company like Nintendo there's always pressure to develop sequels to your most successful games. Recently though, we've had Retro Studios developing *Metroid Prime*, SEGA is working on *F-Zero* and Namco are developing the new *StarFox* game, so in that respect we've started looking to more and more third-party companies to be involved with creating games using Nintendo's characters."

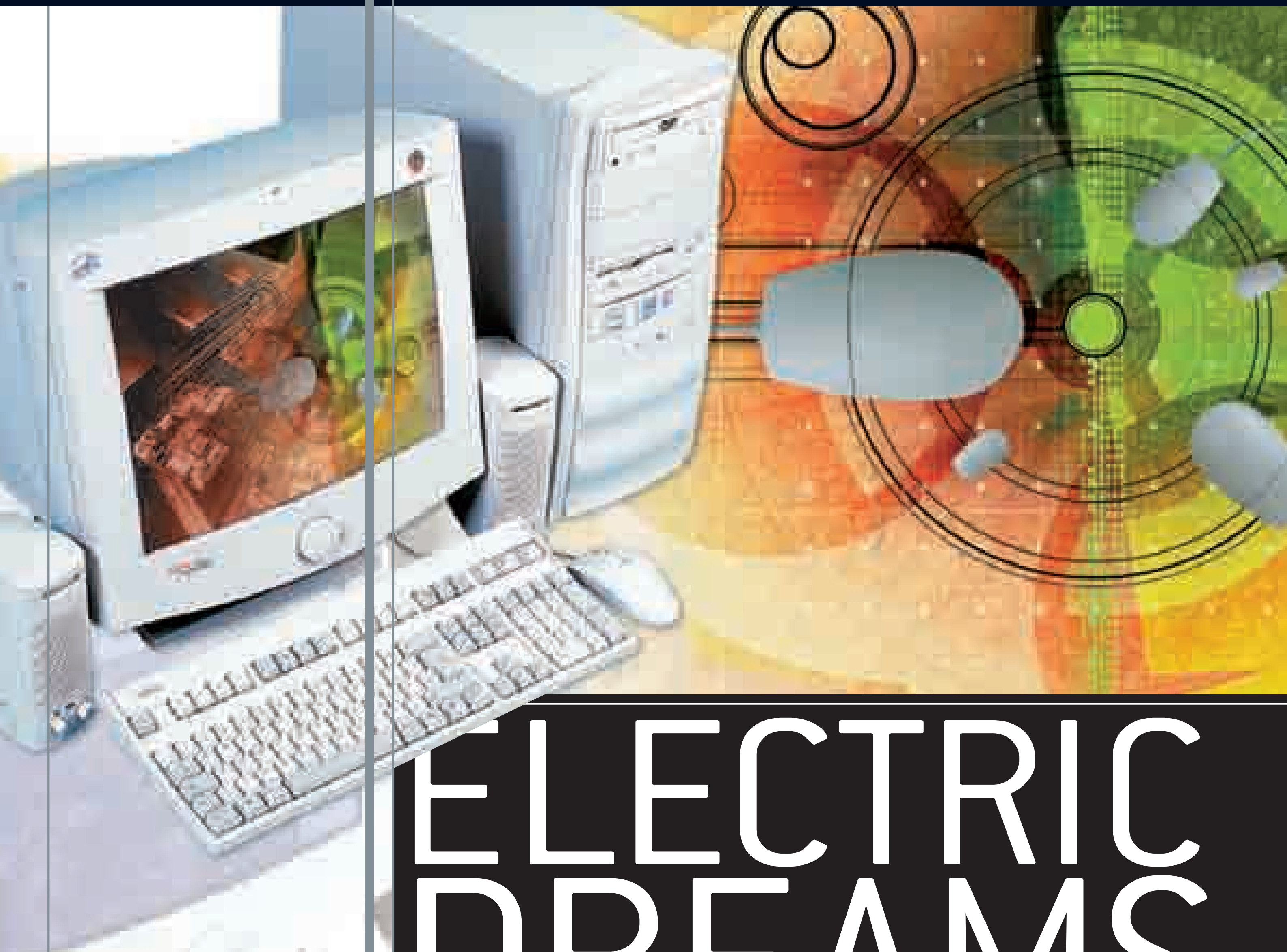
Miyamoto-san's acknowledgment of GameCube's third-party support is pretty indicative of the change in Nintendo's attitude over the last few years. Once a developer who preferred to keep itself to itself, Nintendo now holds regular public displays of its games, dishes out demo discs (in Japan, at least) and even lets the press get within sniffing distance of its rather attractive titles more than it used to. That said though, Miyamoto-san's assurance of third-party support doesn't exactly explain why some big-name firms appear to be pulling in the reins when it comes to developing for the GameCube. The console might hold all the cards when it comes to first-party titles but in terms of backing from firms like Activision or EA… well, it's just not there.

"If you are just simply comparing the hardware then in terms of functionality of course you can make similar games," says Miyamoto-san, "which is why many developers are trying to make multi-platform games. It may be good for gaming audiences, but when it comes to the unique attraction of each format, I really don't think multi-platform games are contributing a lot to getting the best out of each console. That's why it's important for Nintendo to come up with the best first-party titles and unique entertainment experiences that only we can provide."

Ah, now there's the Nintendo we used to know and love – bullish, unyielding and suitably resolute that it doesn't need anyone but itself. Former Nintendo president Yamauchi-san may have retired, but it looks as though his spirit lives on more than the current management may believe…

The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker *is released in the UK on 3 May and will be reviewed next issue*





ELECTRIC DREAMS

UNLESS YOU'RE WELL-VERSED IN THE WORLD OF PC HARDWARE, BUYING YOURSELF THE ULTIMATE GAMING PC CAN BE A BIT OF A NIGHTMARE. AFTER ALL, YOU DON'T WANT TO BE LUMBERED WITH AN INCREDIBLY EXPENSIVE WHITE ELEPHANT…

Thanks to a large number of retailers across the country, it's now entirely possible for any gamer to wander in off the street and say 'I'd like to buy a PC to play games on, please!' in a very confident manner. Of course, what that ultimately results in is you coming away with a pre-built and usually very expensive piece of equipment; this, as you might have guessed, is a bad thing. Why? Because while you'll now be the proud owner of a brand-spanking new personal computer it might not do exactly what you want it to do, especially if you're looking to play games on it rather than type letters.

Conflicts, compatibility issues and crashes; these are the demons of the gamer who's bought the wrong PC. Even worse is how quickly technology moves on – with sell-by dates of little more than six months before the next big thing from NVIDIA, Intel or Creative comes along, PC gear goes mouldy very quickly.

But before you go rushing back to your consoles, you should probably note that PC gaming has come on in leaps and bounds in the last few years. Now, rather than just being the bastion of hard-core RPGs and flight sims, the PC is a more viable gaming platform than ever before. What's more, the power and flexibility of a gaming PC (thanks mostly to the scope for upgrading) should not be under-estimated by console gamers.

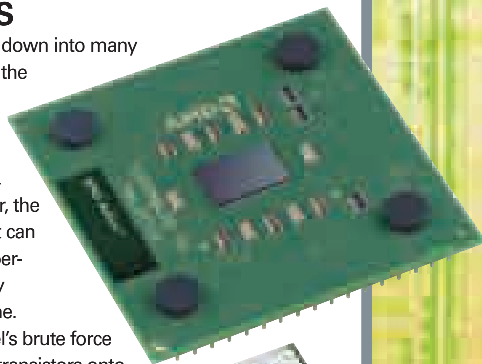
Unfortunately, taking that first step into PC gaming can be a difficult one – get it wrong and you could be scarred for life, but get it right and the results can be oh so sweet. Thankfully, it's just a matter of knowing where to start…

PROCESSOR

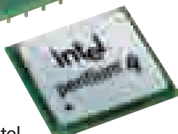
In the PC world there are two competitors for your cash in most of the important categories. For starters, there's the key part of any PC, the CPU (central processing unit). Fighting it out for the hearts and minds of the PC gamer in this department are original PC processor creators Intel and punky (well, they'd like to think so) challengers AMD. Being the original – and some would say the best – Intel offers a brute force solution with the latest Pentium 4 running at a hefty 3.06GHz. AMD's top of the range Athlon XP chips run a fair bit slower at 2.25GHz, but are significantly more efficient than Intel chips and most gamers reckon that you can get more performance from an AMD chip.

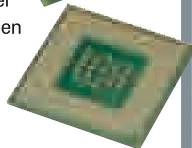
GET ON THE BUS

The modern CPU is broken down into many parts, each of which affects the overall performance. We won't bore you with the exact technical details but the faster a processor's bus, the more data it can transfer, the bigger its cache, the more it can store and, with modern super-pipelines, they can do many calculations at the same time.



At the practical level, Intel's brute force approach packs a lot more transistors onto the chip, making it a more expensive option – something that makes a lot of people turn to AMD with their smaller, smarter and less expensive models. An off-shoot of this is that Intel chips tend to run hotter, leading to a problem when hard-core gamers try to over-clock their processors, increasing the speed to get more performance.





Over-clocking is increasingly common among games players.

Traditionally, Intel loathed the idea and put blocks in place to stop the practice, while AMD embraced it, making it easier for users to turn up the speed. Now both camps, along with motherboard makers, treat it as an accepted practice – as long you don't mind forking out for a new one should your processor melt or blow up. There are also plenty of extra cooling devices you can buy to make sure your chip doesn't fry.

"OVER-CLOCKING IS AN ACCEPTED PRACTICE – AS LONG AS YOU DON'T MIND FORKING OUT FOR A NEW PROCESSOR SHOULD YOURS MELT OR BLOW UP"

"AS THE PROCESSORS GET FASTER THEY CAN DEAL WITH DATA MORE QUICKLY, WHICH LEAVES THE REST OF THE COMPUTER STRUGGLING TO KEEP UP"

MOTHERBOARD

Once you've chosen a chip then you need a motherboard to stick it in. The rule here is pretty simple: AMD and Intel type motherboards do not mix, so your processor type will dictate what kind of board you get. But that would make for a really short section so you won't be surprised to hear that there's a lot more involved…

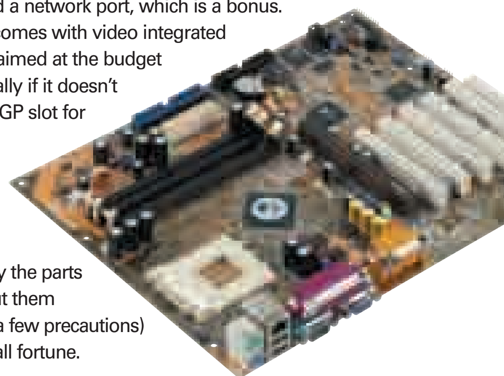
RUN LIKE (OVER) CLOCKWORK

The motherboard ties all the parts of your computer together – call it the central nervous system for your PC. It used to be an easy life being a motherboard, locked away in a case no-one opened, but as processors get faster they can deal with data more quickly, which leaves the rest of the computer struggling to keep up. Modern motherboards are speeding up too in the race to feed the processor evermore data and almost all the parts of a system can be upgraded, so they need more connections and need to be user-friendly. Prices start at around £60, going up to £200 for the top of the range.

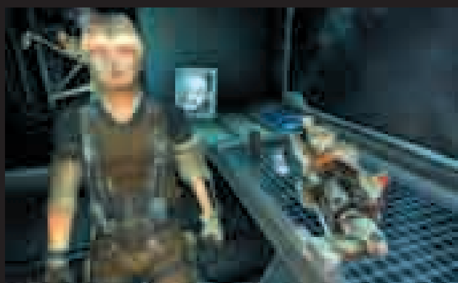
As motherboards get faster so the memory (or RAM) has to keep up too, which makes the right choice vital. There are a host of motherboard makers, all offering a huge range of boards from the simplest budget option to mighty multi-processor platforms with features to make a techie's head spin. When you buy a motherboard you need the right kind of memory to go with it and it needs to fit in your existing case, most of which are ATX models so that shouldn't be a problem. Any PC shop will have a range of motherboards and the box should list compatible chips and memory that you can use with it.

Most boards have on-board sound, which you can disable to use your better high-power sound card and a network port, which is a bonus. But if a board comes with video integrated then it's being aimed at the budget market, especially if it doesn't have a spare AGP slot for your monster graphics card to drop into.

The good news is almost anyone can buy the parts for a PC and put them together (with a few precautions) and save a small fortune.



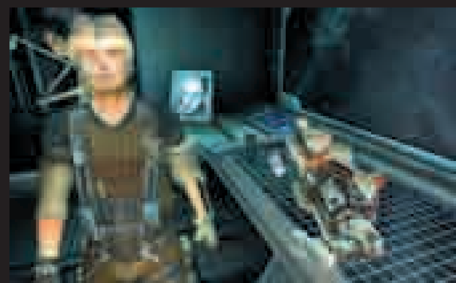
POLY-GONE: COMPLETE RESOLUTION



The lower the resolution, the more frames per second a graphics card can create – but less pixels on-screen means anything made of polygons starts to look blocky. (Spec: 800x600, 2x Anti-aliasing, Bilinear Filtering)



Increasing resolution reduces the problem, although this makes more work for your graphics card. Trilinear filtering also helps smooth out certain texture layers. (Spec: 1024x768, 6x Anti-aliasing, Trilinear Filtering)



Anisotropic filtering is a recent technique that corrects sloping surfaces and sharpens pixels, therefore making things like stairs and wall detail much more realistic. (Spec: 1280x1024, 6x Anti-aliasing, Anisotropic Filtering)

GRAPHICS

In PC land, two titans slug it out for the title of fastest graphics: the dethroned champion NVIDIA (a rubbish name but a titan of video power) and its rival (in a similar role as AMD against Intel), ATI. Since last October, ATI has had the nerve to be faster than the mighty NVIDIA with its Radeon 9700 graphics processor. This month would have seen the release of NVIDIA's GeForce FX graphics chip, but such is the competition in the PC graphics market it has been cancelled in favour of a superior next-next-generation chip that will feature in cards from the likes of Hercules, Crucial, Creative Labs and many others.

SITTING PRETTY

While NVIDIA tries to take back the title of king of graphics, ATI's own next-generation processor seeks to raise the bar even higher. This battle has raged for a year or two now, all the time pushing visual quality and speed higher, which generates temperatures hot enough to fry eggs on your machine – search the web and there are examples to prove this!

Looking at the pictures below you can see the quality of image these giants can produce, in real-time and with breathtaking animation. These cards will be a requirement for playing the likes of *Doom III* and next year's PC titles as they add more and more detail to the screen.

To use one, you need the most powerful PC components around. 8X AGP slots are a must to provide the required bandwidth as is a 350-watt power supply to feed these beasts enough juice to keep going. Indeed, they generate so much heat that the GeForce FX card, which will get a very limited release, comes with extra cooling that takes up a second slot in your system. Advanced cooling solutions like this will be increasingly common as the heat continues to rise

While the industry clamours for these cards, the benefits to the gamer are twofold. Firstly, you can play older and current games a lot faster and smoother than with your existing video card – there's nothing like going back to *Quake II* or *III* and maxing out all the effects you had to turn down a year or two ago. Secondly, you should get a couple of long years of gaming before having to worry about upgrading again. Mainly because games that support all these new features are still far on the horizon – patience is a virtue.

"SUCH IS THE COMPETITION IN THE PC GRAPHICS MARKET, CHIPS ARE CANCELLED BEFORE THEY'RE RELEASED IN FAVOUR OF A SUPERIOR NEXT-NEXT-GENERATION MODEL"

"PCS WILL SOON BE ABLE TO HANDLE ALL SOUND FORMATS AND SCARE THE PANTS OFF PLAYERS EVERYWHERE WITH EERIE EFFECTS AND BIG SONIC SURPRISES"

SOUND

Sound on a PC used to be a simple matter – you had stereo sound and then you had, um, stereo sound. Over the last couple of years, it's all gone a bit mad. A lot of companies produced virtual surround sound that still used two speakers, but as PCs started to play movies on DVD a host of home theatre systems were unleashed on unsuspecting punters. First there was 5.1, with the .1 being the sub-woofer and five speakers offering left, right, centre, side left and side right sound. Then came 6.1 adding a rear centre speaker, and now 7.1 sound is the latest with two rear speakers, just like in your local cinema.

TWO-TONE

All of this is fine but most games still play in plain stereo. However, as graphics begin to challenge Hollywood realism, the soundtrack is becoming a lot more important. As PC users pick up surround sound audio cards and speaker systems, more games will take advantage of the simple but phenomenal power of "Behind you!"

Owners of an NVIDIA Nforce2 motherboard will already be blessed with 5.1 sound but for most of us it means another expansion card. Leading the way in PC sound for years has been Creative Labs with their SoundBlaster range – these were replaced with the new Audigy 2 cards that offer more outs than a game of baseball. Hercules is also in the running with its DigiFire 7.1 card, and looking to take a slice of the market is German outfit Terratec. Fans of perfect audio will swear by Yamaha's SW1000XG card.

As with video, most sound cards can play any of the formats that games use, from EAX to A3D and now Dolby Digital, DTS and THX. Soon whatever the sound format, the PC will be able to handle it and scare the pants off players everywhere with eerie effects and sonic surprises.

New developments in sound include reflective environmental audio – this means when you're in a cave in, say, *Dungeon Siege*, every echo comes from the right place. If your army is marching through a valley then long echoes filter back, and in *Jedi Knight* lasers in a metallic corridor make those pinging and hissing sounds just like in the movies. As graphics can only get a little more complex, sound is playing a big part in current gaming advances, so pay attention to your audio.

SPECS APPEAL: WHAT CAN A PC DO FOR YOUR GAMES?



id Software's *Doom III* requires a 2003 specification PC to play, so expect sales of computers to rocket as the scariest game in history arrives. But will it be a player's game or just a piece of juicy eye candy that will turn the reviewers against John Carmark?



3D Mark is the lead benchmarking test tool for PCs and it shows what kind of visuals the games of next year will be producing. The latest edition is causing much controversy as developers claim it fails to simulate real world gaming developments.



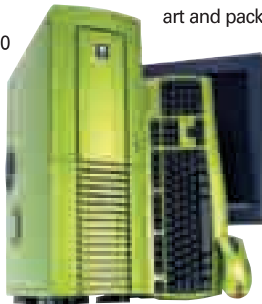
Current games like *Freelancer* can be run at very high resolutions for ultra-smooth graphics with a host of special effects. You can also crank up the anti-aliasing for supersmooth lines and run them at maximum colour depths.

AURORA DDR

Developer: Alienware **Price:** £1,489.60 **Release Date:** Out Now

Available from: www.alienware.co.uk
CPU: AMD Athlon XP 2800+
Graphics Processing Unit: ATI Radeon 9700 Pro
Sound Processing Unit: Sound Blaster Audigy 5.1
Memory: 512MB DDR SDRAM PC-2700
Storage: 120GB Western Digital UltraATA 7200RPM 8MB Cache
Other Features:

- 16/48X DVD-ROM Drive
- Dragon Full Tower Case with 420Watt PSU
- NForce2 Motherboard
- KoolMaxx Video Cooling system
- 100MB Ethernet port
- 56K PCI Modem
- Internet Keyboard
- Intellimouse Explorer 3.0
- Windows XP Home Edition
- Free 1-year warranty



Launched in the UK at the end of last year, every component is tailored for games players, using only the highest quality and fastest parts. Alienware PCs are very stylish and have excellent cooling systems. The Aurora DDR is the current state of the art and packs massive performance while offering many years of gaming without the need for upgrading. This model doesn't have a monitor as standard but you can always order one or a lovely new flat screen as an option – a good display is worth the money.

CUTTING EDGE WINTEL PC

Developer: Poweroid **Price:** £2,536.83 **Release Date:** Out Now

Available from: www.poweroid.com
CPU: Intel Pentium 3.06GHz Multi-threaded
Graphics Processing Unit: ATI Radeon 9700 Pro
Sound Processing Unit: Creative Audigy 2
Memory: 512MB RD RAM PC800
Storage: 120GB Western Digital UltraATA 7200RPM 8MB Cache
Other Features:

- Sony 48Speed CD Writer
- 16 Speed DVD Drive
- Coolermaster ATC 710SX2 / GX2 Case
- Asus P4T533C Motherboard with Intel 850E chipset
- Iiyama AS4637 18" LCD Screen
- 56K PCI Modem
- Logitech Cordless Keyboard
- Logitech Cordless Mouse
- Windows XP Home Edition
- Inspire 6700 THX Speakers
- Free 1-year warranty



Poweroid is a UK company offering custom-built systems with both Intel and AMD processor options. Their star model packs the same leading graphics and sound card as the Alienware machine but uses the maximum amount of Intel chip, motherboard and RD-RAM horsepower to make it the fastest machine you can buy. The 18-inch LCD screen is a fantastic piece of gear offering slimline high resolution gaming.

DIMENSION 8250

Developer: Dell **Price:** £1,916.43 **Release Date:** Out Now

Available from: www.dell.co.uk
CPU: Intel Pentium 3.06GHz Multi-threaded
Graphics Processing Unit: ATI Radeon 9700 Pro
Sound Processing Unit: Creative Audigy 2
Memory: 512MB RD RAM PC1066
Storage:120GB 7200RPM 2MB Cache
Other Features:

- 48 Speed CD Writer
- 16 Speed DVD Drive
- Coolermaster ATC 710SX2 / GX2 Case
- Asus P4T533C Motherboard with Intel 850E chipset
- Ultra 18" Screen
- 56K PCI Modem
- Logitech Cordless Keyboard
- Logitech Cordless Mouse
- Windows XP Home Edition
- Inspire 6700 THX Speakers
- Free 1-year warranty



Better known for its business machines, Dell's Dimension range is aimed at the power user and packs a huge punch. Through the Dell website (www.dell.co.uk) you can custom order the machine of your dreams – remember to check the make of the components before you order.

Although there are cheaper parts, it only takes one small piece to affect the performance of your whole PC set-up.

PC GLOSSARY

The personal computer market is home to more acronyms and buzzwords than your average medical dictionary – try some of these terms on for size…

AGP – The Advanced Graphics Port is the current way of throwing data at your graphics card as quickly as possible. Available in three speeds: 2X, 4X and 8X.

Anti-aliasing – Anti-aliasing adds extra pixels along edges and lines to smooth out the effects in 3D games.

ATX – The standard format for PC motherboards, an ATX motherboard will fit into an ATX case. Some companies make custom boards for their own cases, rendering the cases and boards useless anywhere else.

CPU – Central Processor Unit, the formal name for the chip that does all the calculations on the PC. Graphics and sound accelerators take the workload off the processor, freeing it up to do more complex tasks.

DDR & RD-RAM – Double Data Rate and Rambus Direct are fighting it out to become the high-speed memory standard.

DirectX – This is a level of code that allows developers to make games that are compatible with all sorts of hardware.

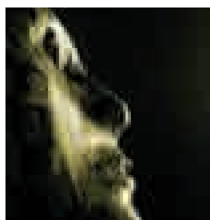
Gigahertz (GHz) – Gigahertz are used to measure how many billions of instructions a computer can process per second. Intel measures its performance in gigahertz, but AMD uses a speed rating (2800+) as its processors are physically slower but nimbler when it comes to processing.

Multi-threaded processing – The very latest Intel chip can act as two separate processors, working in parallel with each other to do theoretically double the workload of a non-threaded processor.

Overclocking – Turning up the speed on your components above the advised limit. Potentially dangerous but rewarding for much faster gaming.

Processor Bus – The link that connects the CPU to the rest of the computer. The faster the better, obviously.

games™ USA REPORT



LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE

"WHILE THE MARKET FOR CURRENT USED GAMES HAS BEEN LARGELY CHOKED BY BIG BUSINESS, THE RETRO FIELD IS IN EXCELLENT HEALTH"

Something dreadful happened to my friend Billy the other day. I was watching him eat dinner – I've been watching him a lot lately; cleaning, talking on the phone, even sleeping – when he let out a piercing shriek and rose from the table. As he did so, the unmistakable sight of urine running from the legs of his khakis onto the lino was readily apparent. Overwhelmed by disgrace, Billy burst into a fit of hysterical sobbing on the spot then, I swear, collapsed into a deep sleep on the soaking ground beneath him. I later learned he was suffering from chronic exhaustion.

Now, it probably matters to you that Billy is my Sim – a virtual young man created for my own amusement – but I have welcomed him into my home with the warmth of any relative, which is why it pains me to see him stricken by such personal disorder. My compassion is likely due to the startling humanity evident in my boy and the life he leads, a realism that no doubt loses credibility back there at home.

You see, Americans really are Sims. A hot tub and a barbecue equals bliss. Quality of entertainment is directly proportional to the size of screen it's presented on. The two species are directly comparable. Take the guy who lives in the apartment above mine, for instance; when home alone, he openly babbles gibberish, coos, dances, sings and even weeps aloud at unpredictable intervals. I know this because after moving in, I discovered these spacious coastal residences are built exclusively from the finest papier-mâché and scented pine matchsticks. Once in a while, there is also the distinct thump followed by total silence that, I presume, can only be the signature of a man yielding suddenly to unchecked fatigue. I only caught a glimpse of him once, putting out the 'garbage' at 5am – it was dark, but I could've sworn there was a spinning diamond above his head. Maybe it's just how people are in my neighbourhood.

Whatever it is, it's catching. One look at the price of used console software and my reaction was not dissimilar to that of young Billy's to exhaustion. *GTA Vice City*: $49.99 brand new, $44.99 used and in God knows what condition; most second-hand games I've seen appear to have been owned by dirty children who've not played them so much as worn them on the soles of their shoes. Same story with *Metroid Prime*, *Ghost Recon*, *TimeSplitters 2* and in fact any title released within the last 18 months that you'd actually want to play.

What's more unsettling than this cruel pricing is its sinister uniformity across completely separate retail chains: in a conspiracy of greed, even fierce competitors have agreed to erect an impenetrable wall of overpricing that no amount of travelling-around-looking-for-the-best-price can get through. The corporate reasoning seems to be that if you learn that used software costs are the same everywhere, you'll just buy from the closest store – therefore, no business steps on another's

MR SHAPE, PRIVATE DICK

Ever the wily sleuth with the interests of innocent kids at heart (okay, it was Superbowl Sunday and I couldn't understand anything but the adverts), I decided to test the retailer's margin in the immoral charade of the second-hand market. Offering my own copy of *Vice City* to a prominent chain selling used copies at the aforementioned $44.99 (normally, I wouldn't; 'twas purely in the interests of research) I was told, following the consultation of a secret list, that I would be reimbursed to the thunderous tune of $14. That's f-o-u-r-t-e-e-n dollars and no cents. And with that it was clear: they've effectively strangled the used market, one of the most enjoyable parts of modern gaming outside of actually playing.

I have a friend in Britain who still pays just £5 to swap his most recently completed title for the Latest Big Thing, and bargains are to be found all over; you don't know how good you've got it out there. The only option that remains for the bargain hunter here is the ever wonderful eBay, but it's not always convenient to drop whatever real-world pursuits might construct what you'd call a life, just to fire up a computer and snipe *Panzer Dragoon Orta* away from gamezphreak77 for a few extra pennies.

Happily, while the market for current used games has been largely choked by big business, the retro field is in excellent health. Expansive bins of old cartridges (NES and Super NES get the most space) can be found in the dusty back end of almost all outlets and, like a hawkish vinyl collector, you can while away hours flipping through labelled spines, searching for that old classic. Perhaps something relatively common but timeless like *Yoshi's Island*, or a buried gem such as the SNES version of *Dracula X*.

As extortionate sums continue to be asked for even the most soulless French-produced next-gen trash, I know one thing: I'll be spending a lot more time in the company of Yoshi and Richter Belmont from now on.

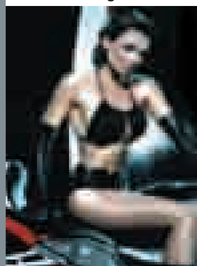
toes, which would likely provoke a proper pricing war that's bound to have casualties but benefit the consumer. Of course, one fortunate side-effect of this for the stores is that given the choice of a fresh, sealed copy of *Burnout 2* and a disc that looks as though it was recovered from the highway, you'll pay the extra five bucks – kerching!

Happy shopping, everyone…

Cheers The Shape

MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Dannii Minogue



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Ice storms





Best game ever? The Americans seem to think so.

■ Good Lord, *GTA: Vice City* still at the top of the US charts. This month, however, *Dragonball Z* has the, er, honour of the hallowed number two place.

WANT ANY QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY THE SHAPE? THEN DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net … HE MIGHT LISTEN, IF YOU'RE LUCKY.

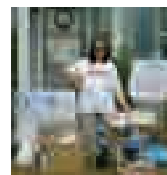
AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

TAG SALES

Kind of like car boot sales, only less sour – held in people's yards and missing the middle-aged couple seeking gilded shaving mugs from the Thirties.

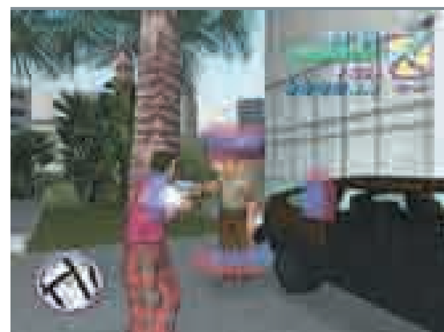




USA MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar	PS2
2	Dragonball Z: Budokai	Infogrames	PS2
3	Madden NFL 2003	EA	Multi
4	Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	Xbox
5	The Lord Of The Rings: The Two Towers	EA	Multi
6	Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past	Nintendo	GBA
7	Yu-Gi-Oh! Eternal Duelist Soul	Konami	GBA
8	James Bond 007: Nightfire	EA	Multi
9	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Multi
10	Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance	Midway	Multi

(Updated 03/02/03)





games™ JAPAN REPORT



KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT OLLIE BARDER

"AS WIDESPREAD AS THE ENTHUSIASM FOR GAMING IS IN JAPAN (AND IT REALLY IS), IT'S STILL REGARDED AS SOCIALLY 'ODD'"

The arcades in Japan are pure and unadulterated centres of gaming. They ooze passion and enthusiasm, but also have that air of worrying fanaticism. You'd never find places like these in Britain – despite having 'arcades' of your own, they are normally rather tawdry affairs and are often filled with slobbering simpletons. Yet most Japanese people regard arcades with the same amount of contempt that the British do. In a country where people actually play *Virtual On Force* and gleefully welcome challengers in a friendly manner, most people still feel ashamed to like playing games, either at home or in public.

As widespread as the enthusiasm for gaming is in Japan (and it really is), it's still regarded as socially 'odd'. The likes of 'otaku' culture is mostly to blame for this. The word 'otaku' originated within animé and manga fandom – used as a polite greeting amongst fans, it quickly became adopted by outside circles to refer to something as 'geeky' or 'sad'. These days, the word 'otaku' covers almost any type of hobby with a fanatical fanbase.

Japanese culture is all about harmony and homogeny. This bland tranquillity is called 'wa' and its disruption will (supposedly) lead to your, or someone else's, demise. Not only do 'otaku' upset the 'wa' but they're also different in an apparently anti-social way. Unsurprisingly, this leads to a double whammy of public dislike towards geekiness in general. Gaming is thought of as being inherently geeky in Japan, simply due to the enthusiasm surrounding it, so it's frowned upon. There's meant to be strength in numbers, but this just isn't the case here. Gaming is one of the top pastimes that most Japanese people enjoy, yet they do so secretly for fear of chastisement. The arcades, generally lively places, are deemed 'no-go' areas by most Japanese, almost as if they were dirty (despite actually being rather nice, clean and friendly places).

Admittedly, all is not lost. Compared to Britain, the gaming scene is far more vibrant. However, we 'gaijin' (Westerners) still adhere to the common misconception that gaming culture in Japan is somehow chic, sexy and oh-so-popular. The latter may be true statistically, but trying to advocate gaming as a lifestyle would probably make you look rather inadequate in the eyes of many Japanese people.

Popularity and social acceptance are mutually exclusive here, with the latter definitely holding more sway. Gaming has a long way to go before the average Joe Yamamoto feels he can wear that Fei-Yen costume in public (important note: costume players are categorically frightening on many deep and disturbing psychological levels), let alone anyone openly admitting that they enjoy playing something like *Rez*.

On the upside though, gamers do want to get funky with other like-minded enthusiasts. The only problem is finding them…

Kind regards

Ollie Barder

TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON FOUR: IN THE ARCADE

Ge-mu shiyo-yo!	Hey, let's play!
Imano neratta?	Did you do that intentionally?
Imano guuzen	I didn't mean to do that
Imano settai	I let you win
Zuruiyo!	You cheated!
Hokano gemu shiyoze…	Let's play another game…
Oh… kuso	Oh… shit

BEHAVE YOURSELF

Japan is a very polite place – that's why the important thing to remember is that you, as a gaijin, most probably look fat, scary and smell strange to many Japanese people. To avoid being hunted by lethal squads of ninja, here are a few pointers on how to conduct yourself in the average Japanese arcade.

• ALWAYS, ALWAYS ASK IF YOUR OPPONENT WANTS TO GO AGAINST YOU HEAD TO HEAD

It may seem trite, but how would you like it if you were trying to get some insane high score or practice some sick manoeuvre only to be interrupted by the aforementioned fat and smelly gaijin? Politeness is free – credits cost money.

• SHOW RESPECT TO PEOPLE WHO HAND YOU YOUR POSTERIOR

Japanese gamers are all very skilled and at some point, you will have your buttocks handed to you in a basket. Therefore, smashing the machine in frustration and/or screaming profanities won't do you any favours. It is also worth mentioning that if you do lose, don't re-challenge without asking; it just makes you look dumb and a sore loser. Many places get busy later in the evening and queuing often ensues – don't hog a machine (especially if you're losing) and don't bemoan the fact that you have to wait to play again.

• "THE ART OF FIGHTING WITHOUT FIGHTING"

As sad as it is true, many Japanese gamers don't engage head-on with their opponent. This can be perceived as cheap or cowardly play and, for the most part, you would be correct in your accusations. However, to make a point of this to your adversary is a really bad idea. Ideally, you should learn from their dishonourable tactics. Whatever kills you over and over again in the same mind-numbing way has to make you stronger, surely?

• IF YOU SEE A GUY WEARING BLACK SHADES, A WHITE SUIT AND SNAKESKIN SHOES…

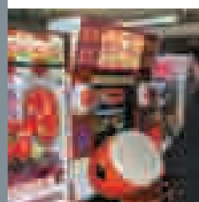
… let him win – he's most probably a member of the yakuza and if you beat him you might end up losing the odd finger or two. It happened to a particularly gifted *Virtua Fighter*-playing friend of mine, who now has to use his nose in order to press the guard button. True story…



Doing badly? Step aside, sonny, let someone else try.



Don't argue, just let them win. It's easier that way.

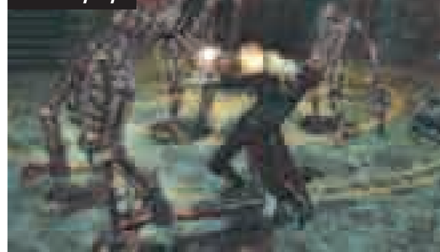


You probably won't find this in the UK any time soon.

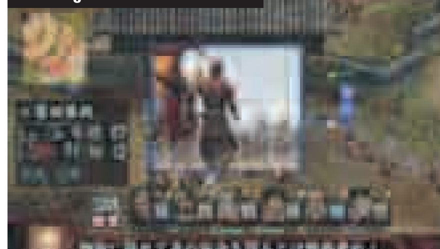
JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Devil May Cry 2	Capcom	PS2
2	Nobunaga's Ambition Soutenroku	Koei	PS2
3	Makai Senki Disgaia Nippon	Ichi	PS2
4	James Bond 007: Nightfire	Electronic Arts	PS2
5	Taikou No Tetsujin	Namco	PS2
6	Pokémon Ruby	Nintendo	GBA
7	Pokémon Sapphire	Nintendo	GBA
8	Pawapuro Kun Pocket 5	Konami	PS2
9	Armoured Core 3: Silent Line	From Software	PS2
10	Ratchet & Clank: Special Edition	Sony	PS2

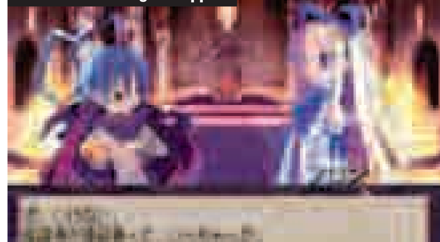
(Dengeki Console Game Ranking Top 50, week ending 08/02/03)



Devil May Cry 2



Nobunaga's Ambition Soutenroku



Makai Senki Disgaia Nippon

"THERE WAS NO REASON WHY WE SHOULD HAVE BELIEVED, AS A BUNCH OF YOUNG GUYS MAKING A GAME, THAT SONY WOULD HAVE LOVED CRASH BANDICOOT"

JASON RUBIN

JASON RUBIN

NAUGHTY DOG

It's the bedroom programmer's dream: from humble Apple II beginnings, Jason Rubin and his firm Naughty Dog took to the world stage when Crash Bandicoot was adopted as the unofficial PlayStation mascot. But success took its time in coming and it was a good while before the crazy marsupial spun his way to stardom, as Rubin explains. "We sold our first game in 1985, when we were 15 years old," he says, referring to himself and Naughty Dog's other founder, Andy Gavin. "It was called *Ski Crazed* and it was a terrible game – about as far from skiing as you can get." Even the firm's official Web site doesn't speak too highly of its early efforts and, on this occasion, Rubin curiously neglects to mention that his firm were also responsible for the truly remarkable *Way Of The Warrior* on the 3DO.

The company's real break came with the birth of the PlayStation. "We were lucky enough to see the PSone very early on," Rubin recalls. "Extremely excited by it, we started making what we considered the mascot character for Sony." While it was never made official, Crash quickly became the face of the PlayStation and, given the advent of *Super Mario 64*, it couldn't have come at a better time for the console.

As the series grew in popularity, Sony clearly realised the potential of the games' developers and bought up Naughty Dog. "Sony bought us three years ago but it hasn't changed a thing," Rubin says, "We were already halfway through *Jak And Daxter*". And Rubin reminds us that *Jak And Daxter* was much better received than any of the *Bandicoot* adventures but couldn't match them at retail.

But just how much work goes into creating the stars of these games? Crash's father fills us in on the creation of Jak's sidekick, Daxter: "It took four and a half months to create the visuals, months and months to animate and a month and a half to find a voice for him – even the name took three months." After all that effort, Rubin seems fairly happy with the end result, but he has a few things to say about several other big names in gaming, namely some of Crash's platforming rivals. "Sonic had a one-dimensional personality… he was fast," he quips between Mario impressions. "Very different to Mario, though. Mario has no personality, you don't know anything about him – he could be grumpy, happy or anything – but he was recognisable, that was the big thing about him."

Rubin then goes on to discuss how they wanted to create a new character to take advantage of the more powerful hardware of the PlayStation2 rather than try to bring with them a character they felt was restrictive. He doesn't regret giving up the Bandicoot though, even going on to add: "I would have given up Mario and I would have given up Sonic."

Never let it be said that this is not a committed man, though. The history in programming and making games that led to his (and his company's) big break should be proof enough of this, but Rubin was determined to reinforce this for us. "For one year during the making of *Crash 2*, I didn't have a single day out of the office and there wasn't a day when we worked less than 14 hours," he says, before adding: "We haven't missed a deadline yet at Naughty Dog." Highly commendable, but hardly surprising given the amount of time the team seemed to spend in the office. But, as Rubin explains, such practice is no longer commonplace: "When it was eight young single people it was fun, but now in a company of 45 people with children, wives and husbands, you can't work those hours."

So what does the future hold for Jason and his company? "We always look out very far at Naughty Dog," he claims. "We're slowly but surely starting to look at the future and what we want to do going into 2005/6". Beyond a single unannounced PlayStation2 title, Naughty Dog's line-up is bare (to anyone not involved in the company, at least), leading us to the assumption that it'll be working to get a title ready for the launch of the PlayStation2's successor. Will it be another platform game? Maybe not. "Any game could be the last character action game we do," Rubin concludes. "We could wake up one morning and decide we're going to do something totally different." So your guess is as good as ours then. But whatever it is, you can be sure it will be something pretty damn good.



YOU'VE CREATED A CHARACTER UNIVERSALLY RECOGNISED AS THE PLAYSTATION MASCOT AND SOLD 25 MILLION OF HIS GAMES. YOU'VE MADE WHAT'S ARGUABLY THE BEST PS2 PLATFORM GAME. WHAT'S LEFT TO DO? QUITE A LOT, APPARENTLY – THE ORIGINAL NAUGHTY DOG, JASON RUBIN, ISN'T NEARLY DONE YET.

IN-DEPTH

COMMUNITY

EVERY ISSUE, **games™** GOES BEHIND THE SCENES WITH A DIFFERENT DEVELOPER. THIS MONTH WE GET THE LOWDOWN ON CANADIAN HOTSHOTS, BIOWARE CORP.

■ *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic* must be one of the most highly anticipated games of the year.

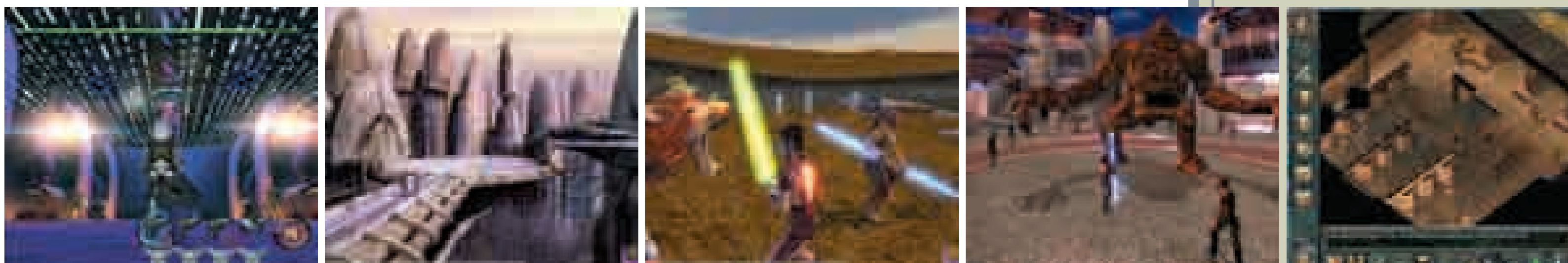
BIOWARE CORP.

Canada – land of snow, Terrance and Philip, people that speak French (but aren't actually from France) and some of the best damn ice hockey teams in the world. It's not, however, the first place that you'd go if you were hoping to find anyone who knows how to develop a good videogame. But, well, it's as good a place to look as any; just because it's a bit colder than the likes of California, Texas or Los Angeles doesn't mean you can't make decent games out there. If you want some proof, all you have to do is head for Edmonton – capital of Alberta, sixth largest city in the country and home of development kings of the north, BioWare. Founded in 1995 by Ray Muzyka and Greg Zeschuk, BioWare is currently LucasArts' new best friend and the birthplace of the next big *Star Wars* game, *Knights Of The Old Republic* (previewed over on page 58).

Naturally, the thought of being able to work on a game based on such a massive licence is something BioWare is particularly pleased about. "The staff here at BioWare are all huge fans of *Star Wars*," says Greg, "and we were absolutely thrilled at the opportunity to create a game in the *Star Wars* universe and work with a great company like LucasArts."

It's no coincidence that BioWare was approached to develop the world's first *Star Wars*-based RPG. As you'd expect, LucasArts doesn't just welcome any old developer into its stable and that's probably why it's no shock to learn that BioWare has had more than its fair share of success off its own back already. With its recent online title *Neverwinter Nights* gaining legions of new fans all the time, and original Advanced D&D-styled *Baldur's Gate* series still selling by the orc-load across the globe, BioWare has established itself as a big player in the games industry – hardly the kind of

Based in Edmonton, Alberta, BioWare has grown steadily since 1995 and now employs over 135 people.



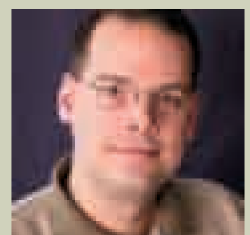
BioWare have worked closely with LucasArts to create a suitable *Star Wars* environment, although LucasArts allowed plenty of creative freedom.

success you'd expect from two qualified doctors with diplomas in medicine from the University of Alberta. "We both trained as medical doctors originally and I still have my medical licence," says Ray. "I effectively retired a number of years ago, though I was practising in my spare time – on weekends and the like – since 1995 when Greg and I co-founded BioWare. I did a lot of rural emergency medicine back then; I always found being the only doc within a hundred mile radius, on call in ER, to be strangely invigorating. But in the end, I always wanted to play games – that's always been my hobby."

Obviously, doing a job that's also your favourite pastime can only be a good thing – we can vouch for that. That said, playing games and owning your own development studio aren't really the same thing; one involves sitting in a comfy chair and enjoying yourself while the other requires managing people, developing ideas and a whole ton of work before you've got anything to show for your efforts.

With BioWare now employing over 135 people – three times as many as when the company was formed – across many different departments, the distinctly hands-on approach that the two founders used to have is becoming more difficult to maintain. "As we've grown in size, things here have become exponentially busier," says Greg. "It's hard to really dig into all of the games we're working on – I tend to focus on the next game to be released – which seems to change every couple months as we finish more games." Just as the amount of time they have to spend playing their own titles decreases though, the chance to experience other games gets even slimmer. "It's kind of ironic, seeing as it's the business we're in," admits Ray, "but as

"IT'S A REAL PLEASURE TO KNOW THAT MILLIONS OF PEOPLE ARE PLAYING OUR GAMES"
RAY MUZYKA



BEEN AND GONE

Since the company's founding in 1995, BioWare has worked on some highly successful projects – not to mention one of our favourite third-person shoot-'em-ups of all time. No wonder LucasArts sat up and took notice of them…

BALDUR'S GATE PC (1998)

The start of the best-selling series (which has seen one official sequel and two expansion discs), taking the form of an in-depth RPG with online gameplay. To date, the *Baldur's Gate* games have sold over 4.5 million copies worldwide.



MDK2 DREAMCAST, PC (2000)

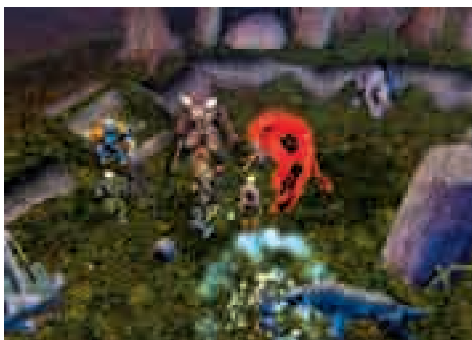
Kurt Hectic's second outing, this time with his friends Max the six-legged dog and Dr Hawkins. The mixture of game styles made this great fun to play and an updated version (*MDK2: Armageddon*) was released on the PS2 in 2001.



Max the six-legged dog helped out Kurt Hectic in BioWare's second instalment of the *MDK* series.

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS PC (2002)

BioWare's latest project is once again an epic RPG that can either be played alone (with a one hundred-hour single-player campaign, no less) or online to create a massive multiplayer experience.

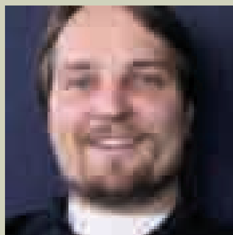






With a good pedigree behind it, BioWare should be able to break the *Star Wars* licence's run of bad games.

"IT'S TRULY AMAZING SEEING THE RESPONSE EACH TIME WE RELEASE A GAME"
GREG ZESCHUK

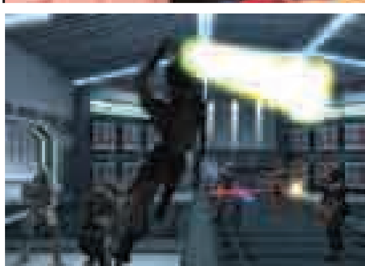


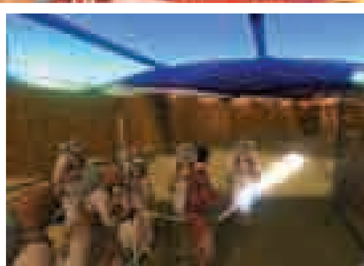
BioWare gets busier I find, increasingly, that I have less free time to play videogames, which certainly causes me no end of heartburn…"

Despite the lack of time though, it's no surprise to learn that BioWare isn't one of those developers that shuts itself away and thinks that everything apart from what it's working on is worthless – in fact, it's quite the opposite. When asked which titles have impressed them over the last few years, they cite a huge number of games (and we do mean huge, with *Final Fantasy X*, *GTA: Vice City*, *Halo*, *Panzer Dragoon Orta*, *Animal Crossing*, *Eternal Darkness*, *Divine Divinity* and *Battlefield 1942* being just some of the games mentioned). It's clear that Ray and Greg like to 'play the field' to see how everyone else is doing it. "Each and every game I play obviously has some kind of influence on my creativity," Rays admits, "whether it be in the area of interface, story, character development, animation, graphics, or something else." Greg agrees: "Every game usually contains some brilliant idea to assimilate," he adds, smiling as he says it.

When it comes to working on *KOTOR* though, the biggest obstacle that BioWare needs to overcome at the moment is not only getting it finished on time, but making it a game worthy of the *Star Wars* universe. Unfortunately, too many games have sullied the *Star Wars* name over the years (from the diabolical *Star Wars: Demolition* to the recent disappointment of *Bounty Hunter*). That's why it's important for the next wave of highly anticipated *Star Wars* titles – *KOTOR* and *Star Wars: Galaxies*, a massively multiplayer online RPG for the Xbox and PC, being developed by LucasArts and Sony Online Entertainment – turn out to be of a high enough quality. Also, with the Star Wars licence being so precious, you might expect the reins to be quite tight in terms of creativity. But that doesn't appear to be the case with *Knights Of The Old Republic*. "LucasArts has given us tremendous support in creating this game and as for creative freedom, they've been great to work with," says Greg. "We've generated all of the story, characters and concepts for the art in the game and they have provided many useful suggestions which we incorporate as we receive them. They presented us with a few options, including what time period it would occur in, but ultimately we found that setting the game a few thousand years before the movies would give us the most freedom to create an epic story with all-new characters and vehicles."

Of course, pleasing LucasArts with new ideas is one thing, but keeping the fans happy is totally different –





something that Ray, Greg and indeed the whole of BioWare are totally aware of. "We're always respectful of the story of *Star Wars*," Ray insists, "and that's probably why we've gotten on so well with LucasArts. We're definitely aware of the huge responsibility to *Star Wars* fans that the first role-playing game set in that universe must maintain the right atmosphere." Assurances are all very well, but the proof of the pudding is in the eating (or, er, playing). Thankfully, from what we've seen so far, *KOTOR* looks like it's turning out to be a game worthy of both the *Star Wars* moniker and the BioWare brand; fingers crossed, the final product will have everything that *Star Wars* fans will want and a whole lot more. You could say it'll be BioWare's biggest triumph to date – although they probably wouldn't agree with you. "To be honest," says Ray, "every game we've released has been a highlight to me. It's just a real pleasure to see our games in the stores and to know that millions of people are playing them." And they are playing them – you only have to look at company's past success to see that…

DOCTOR, DOCTOR

from left to right:

1 Ray Muzyka
Fav game: *System Shock* (PC)

2 Greg Zeschuk
Fav game: *Wasteland* (Apple II)

■ It's a boon that *KOTOR*'s creators are huge fans of *Star Wars*, as are the majority of BioWare employees.



UP AND COMING

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

■ It's the world's first *Star Wars*-based RPG – and about time too. Featuring more interesting elements than we care to mention (although the preview on page 58 does), we hope that the game lives up to our expectations…

RPG GAMES

Titles TBA (PC, Xbox)

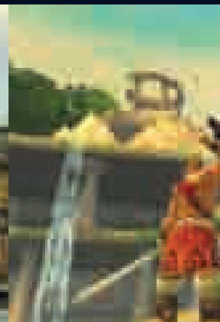
■ Just recently, BioWare has confirmed two brand new projects (both RPGs) – one to be released on the Xbox by Microsoft and the other on the PC once it finds a publisher. Unfortunately, no other information has been released yet.

RELEASE LISTS


Dark Chronicle PS2 Check out the cel-shaded follow-up to *Dark Cloud* on page 70.


Dead To Rights GC, PS2, Xbox Xbox: out now. PS2: out May. GameCube: anyone…?


Kung Fu Chaos Xbox Check out the preview of this *Power Stone*-alike on page 76.



games™ MOST PLAYED

KINGDOM HEARTS

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sony

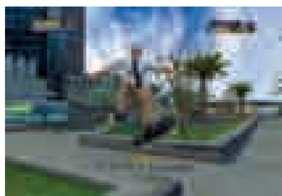
Despite the spongy controls and the occasionally erratic camera, we can't stop playing *Kingdom Hearts*. Square's artists have perfectly captured the spirit of classic Disney and everyone's favourites are here, from Mickey and Donald through to Aladdin and the cast of *The Nightmare Before Christmas*.



TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 4

Format: GC, PS2, Xbox
Publisher: Activision

We're busy going back through last year's games to refresh our memories on which were hot and which were not. *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4* is definitely hot – so much so in fact, that it's one of the only games we've all been playing in our spare time.



DEAD OR ALIVE XTREME BEACH VOLLEYBALL

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft

Despite not being a real volleyball game, *DOAXBV* is a fun little title that we can't put down. The volleyball itself is great fun, but it's the sheer amount of extras to earn that gives the game its longevity. Over 300 bikinis and fashion accessories are yours to collect…





PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher
MARCH '03		
21 March	Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter	Vivendi
21 March	Malice: Kat's Tale	Vivendi
21 March	Midnight Club 2	Rockstar
21 March	The Mark Of Kri	SCEE
21 March	NBA 2K3	Infogrames
21 March	Pride Fighting Championships	THQ
21 March	Rolling	Rage
28 March	Devil May Cry 2	Capcom
28 March	Galleon: Islands Of Mystery	Virgin
28 March	Indiana Jones And The Emperor's Tomb	LucasArts
28 March	ISS 3	Konami
28 March	Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis	Vivendi
28 March	Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	Konami
28 March	NHL 2K3	Infogrames
TBC	Ape Escape 2	SCEE
TBC	Contra: Shattered Soldier	Konami
TBC	Gladius	LucasArts
TBC	Moto GP 3	SCCE
TBC	RTX Red Rock	Activision
TBC	World Championship Snooker	Codemasters
APRIL '03		
4 April	Starsky And Hutch	Empire
11 April	Primal	SCCE
11 April	Zone Of The Enders: The 2nd Runner	Konami Wanted!
25 April	Def Jam Vendetta	Electronic Arts
25 April	Die Hard Vendetta	Vivendi
TBC	Malice: Kat's Tale	Vivendi
TBC	Return To Castle Wolfenstein	Activision
TBC	RTX Red Rock	Activision
TBC	Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness	Eidos
MAY '03		
16 May	Rygar	Wanadoo
30 May	Pro Beach Soccer	Wanadoo
TBC	Dancing Stage Mega Mix	Konami Wanted!
TBC	Dead To Rights	Electronic Arts
TBC	Enter The Matrix	Infogrames
TBC	The Great Escape	Sci
JUNE '03		
6 June	Shaun Murray's Pro Wakeboarder	Activision
TBC	Alter Echo	THQ
TBC	Dark Chronicle	SCEE
TBC	Dungeons And Dragons Heroes	Infogrames
TBC	Futurama	SCi
TBC	SOCOM: US Navy Seals	SCEE
TBC	Yu-Gi-Oh	Konami
JULY '03		
TBC	Everybody's Golf 3	SCCE



GAMECUBE

Month	Title	Publisher
MARCH '03		
21 March	Haven: Call Of The King	Midway
21 March	Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter	Vivendi
21 March	Metroid Prime	Nintendo Wanted!
21 March	NBA 2K3	Infogrames
21 March	Outlaw Golf	TDK
21 March	Rolling	Rage
21 March	Summoner: A Goddess Reborn	THQ
28 March	Galleon: Islands Of Mystery	Virgin
28 March	ISS 3	Konami
28 March	NBA 2K3	Infogrames
28 March	NBA Street 2	Electronic Arts
28 March	NFL 2K3	Infogrames
28 March	NHL 2K3	Infogrames
28 March	World Racing	TDK
TBC	Powerpuff Girls: Shock Of Ages	Bam!
APRIL '03		
04 April	The Sims	Electronic Arts
TBC	Conflict: Desert Storm	SCi
TBC	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos
TBC	V-Rally 3	Infogrames
MAY '03		
03 May	Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo Wanted!
TBC	Enter The Matrix	Infogrames
TBC	NBA Street 2	Electronic Arts
TBC	Resident Evil 2	Capcom
TBC	Resident Evil 3	Capcom
JUNE '03		
TBC	Futurama	Sci
TBC	Red Faction 2	THQ



TBC	Wario World	Nintendo

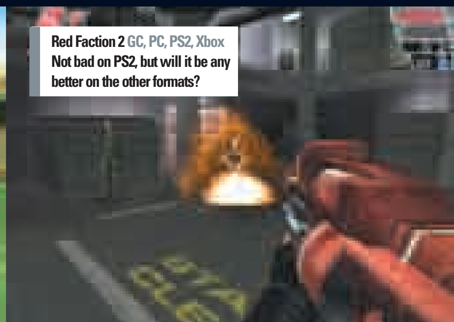
XBOX

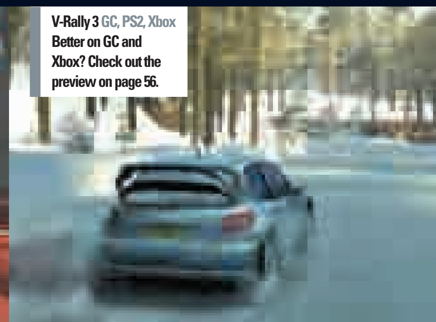
Month	Title	Publisher
MARCH '03		
21 March	Haven: Call Of The King	Midway
21 March	Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter	Vivendi
21 March	Malice: Kat's Tale	Vivendi Wanted!
21 March	NBA Street 2	Electronic Arts
21 March	Panzer Dragoon Orta	Infogrames
21 March	Rolling	Rage
21 March	Shenmue II	SEGA
21 March	State Of Emergency	Rockstar
28 March	Dead Or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball	Microsoft Wanted!
28 March	Galleon: Islands Of Mystery	Virgin

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES


Mark Of Kri PS2
Read why this is an 'almost' on page 100.


Outlaw Golf GC, Xbox
Find out which version is best when the GC version launches in March.


Red Faction 2 GC, PC, PS2, Xbox
Not bad on PS2, but will it be any better on the other formats?


V-Rally 3 GC, PS2, Xbox
Better on GC and Xbox? Check out the preview on page 56.

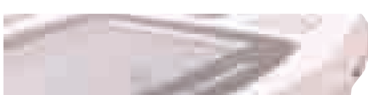
28 March	Indiana Jones And The Emperor's Tomb	LucasArts	
28 March	Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis	Vivendi	
28 March	NBA 2K3	Infogrames	
28 March	NFL 2K3	Infogrames	
28 March	NHL 2K3	Infogrames	
28 March	The Sims	Electronic Arts	
28 March	Star Wars: The Clone Wars	Activision	Wanted!
28 March	V-Rally 3	Infogrames	
TBC	TOCA: Race Driver	Codemasters	
TBC	World Championship Snooker	Codemasters	
APRIL '03			
11 April	Kung Fu Chaos	Microsoft	
11 April	Pro Beach Soccer	Wanadoo	
25 April	Tao Feng: Fist Of The Lotus	Microsoft	
TBC	Midnight Club 2	Rockstar	
TBC	Moto GP2	THQ	
TBC	Return To Castle Wolfenstein	Activision	
TBC	Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic	LucasArts	
MAY '03			
2 May	Project Zero	Microsoft	
2 May	Starsky And Hutch	Empire	
9 May	Group S Challenge	Capcom	
9 May	Midtown Madness 3	Microsoft	
16 May	Enter The Matrix	Infogrames	
TBC	The Great Escape	Sci	
JUNE '03			
6 June	Brute Force	Microsoft	
6 June	Shaun Murray's Pro Wakeboarder	Activision	
TBC	Dungeons And Dragons Heroes	Infogrames	
TBC	Futurama	Sci	
TBC	Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters Melee	Infogrames	
TBC	Outlaw Volleyball	TDK	
TBC	Red Faction 2	TDK	



JULY '03		
11 July	Midtown Madness 3	Microsoft

PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
MARCH '03			
21 March	Highland Warrior	NovaLogic	Wanted!
28 March	Championship Manager 4	Eidos	
28 March	Devastation	NovaLogic	
28 March	Eve Online: The Second Genesis	TDK	
28 March	Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis	Vivendi	Wanted!
28 March	Indiana Jones And The Emperor's Tomb	LucasArts	
28 March	The Sims Online	Electronic Arts	
28 March	Star Trek: Elite Force II	Activision	Wanted!
28 March	TOCA: Race Driver	Codemasters	
TBC	Port Royale	Big Ben	
APRIL '03			
11 April	Big Mutha Truckers	Empire	
11 April	Freelancer	Microsoft	
TBC	Blitzkrieg	CDV	
TBC	Ghost Master	Empire	
TBC	Gothic II	Jo Wood	Wanted!
TBC	Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	Konami	
TBC	Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness	Eidos	
TBC	World Championship Snooker	Codemasters	
MAY '03			
02 May	Colin McRae Rally 3	Codemasters	
02 May	Heaven And Hell	CDV	
16 May	Enter The Matrix	Infogrames	
JUNE '03			
TBC	The Great Escape	Sci	



TBC	Red Faction 2	THQ
TBC	Starsky And Hutch	Empire

GBA

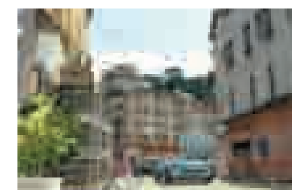
Month	Title	Publisher	
MARCH '03			
21 March	The Lost Vikings	Vivendi	
21 March	Megaman & Bass	Capcom	
21 March	Megaman Battle Network 3	Capcom	
21 March	Sonic Advance 2	Infogrames	
28 March	Bubble Bobble: Old & New	Empire	Wanted!
28 March	James Bond 007: Nightfire	Electronic Arts	
28 March	Legend Of Zelda: ALTTP/ Four Swords	Nintendo	
28 March	The Lost Vikings	Vivendi	
28 March	Super Monkey Ball Jr	Infogrames	
TBC	Phantasy Star Chronicles	SEGA	
TBC	TOCA: World Touring Cars	Ubi Soft	
APRIL '03			
TBC	Altered Beast: Guardian Of The Realms	THQ	
TBC	Crazy Taxi: Catch A Ride	SEGA	
TBC	Kirby: Nightmare In Dream Land	Nintendo	
TBC	The Revenge Of Shinobi	THQ	
TBC	Road Rash: Jailbreak	Zoo	
TBC	Shaun Murray's Pro Wakeboarder	Activision	
TBC	Space Channel 5: Ulala's Cosmic Attack	THQ	
TBC	Yu-Gi-Oh! The Eternal Duelist Soul	Konami	
MAY '03			
TBC	GT Advance 3: Pro Concept Racing	THQ	
TBC	Need For Speed: Porsche Unleashed	Zoo	
TBC	Road Rash: Jailbreak	Zoo	
JUNE '03			
TBC	Rock N' Roll Racing	Vivendi	

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, please bear in mind that they are liable to change at short notice. It's not our fault, really it isn't. Blame market forces. Blame the capricious whims of the publishers. But don't blame us, we tried really hard…

games™ ON THE HORIZON

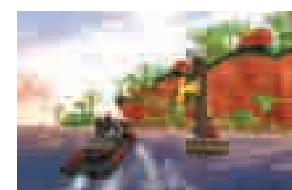
DRIVER 3

Format: GC, PC, PS2, Xbox
Publisher: Infogrames
Since the *Grand Theft Auto* series shifted into 3D and became more popular than ever, the *Driver* games seem to have lost a little of their appeal. However, *Driver 3* will be the first game in the series to take advantage of the next-gen consoles and, as a result, should offer a slightly different experience.



SPLASHDOWN 2

Format: PS2
Publisher: THQ
The original *Splashdown* was surprisingly good, featuring lovely water effects and a good blend of fun and realism. It looks like a more colourful artistic style has been applied to the visuals in the sequel – hopefully, this vibrancy will enhance the atmosphere and widen the game's appeal.



WORMS 3

Format: GC, PC, PS2, Xbox
Publisher: Activision
It's been a while, but the *Worms* series is about to return to the world of videogames. And don't worry, this isn't going to be a dodgy spin-off like *Worms Blast*. However, this will be the first time the game has been in 3D, so it will be interesting to see how well it works. Team 17 is doing the honours again.



THINK TANK

THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS…

IT MIGHT SEEM VERY REAL BUT IT'S ALL JUST A GAME – A LITTLE BIT OF FUN…



***Conflict: Desert Storm* is the culmination of two and a half years work.** It's sold over a million units – a remarkable feat, not just because it's the first game in a new franchise, but also because Pivotal is a young company with a brand new 3D engine.

It all came about after the demise of our previous studio, which was something that was entirely out of our hands. We moved forward with 15 or so people who had worked at the erstwhile Pumpkin Studios. These were people with whom I had worked with for a number of years, and as a result I could confidently take a lot for granted in terms of the way that they worked.

The inspiration for the game came from the activities of the SAS and Delta Force squadrons in the Desert Storm campaign of 1991. For the soldiers who operated in small units far behind enemy lines, it must have called for the sort of bravery that probably very few of us could show in a similar situation.

When we started the game in April 2000, Desert Storm was a historical event that had happened nine years previously. For us it was a great setting to feature Special Forces using the latest military technology.

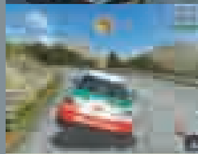
It is easy to draw moral conclusions about games, but games are about entertainment, how quick your reactions are, how good your strategy is, and often how real a setting feels. For generations, people have been playing games based on war such as *Risk*, or even further back with tin soldiers.

War has always been part of the human experience and games are simply a reflection of that. On one hand you have reality and then you have games. The two should never be confused.

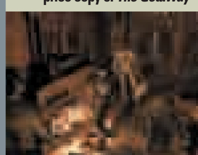
Jim Bambra
Managing Director of Pivotal Games

games™ FROM THE FRONT

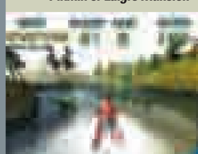


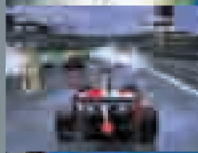


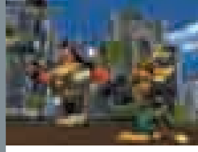
PS2 buyers can bag a cut-price copy of *The Getaway*



But 'Cube buyers will get *Pikmin* or *Luigi's Mansion*





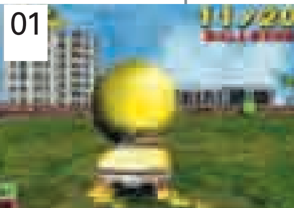


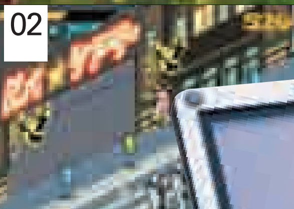
IT'S ALL ABOUT SNEAKY MOVES RATHER THAN HUGE PRICE SLASHES THIS MONTH

EVERY LITTLE COUNTS

As speculation about the next generation of consoles continues to escalate, the big three are pushing their machines harder than ever. The Xbox bundles remain unchanged but, due to the highly competitive pricing of these already, this is hardly surprising. The Gamecube is showing signs of desperation, though – the 'free game' offer currently running in the US has made it over here, albeit in a less impressive form. Rather than *Metroid Prime* and *Resident Evil Zero*, PAL gamers have been offered the likes of *Luigi's Mansion* and *Pikmin* – older titles that don't make the package quite so appealing, but this is almost made up for by the new *Metroid Prime* bundle (a GameCube, the game, a name plate and a controller for £129.99).

Sony, on the other hand, is offering a not-quite-free game with each console sold, and just under £180 will get you the console and one of five titles, including big shots such as *The Getaway* and *Kingdom Hearts*. Sadly, these deals don't really seem to be doing much for the dwindling 'Cube. Hopefully, its performance will be boosted by the forthcoming release of *Metroid Prime* (a bundle pack similar to the *Mario Sunshine* one will also be available) and *Zelda: The Wind Waker*. It certainly needs something to change its failing fortunes.





01: You'd have thought they'd opt for a nonsensical top-down viewpoint, but instead SEGA is going for the full 3D *Crazy Taxi* experience.
02: *Jet Set Radio* will also be joining the mobile ranks, making yet another familiar title to draw gamers into the Game Boy Advance's wonderful portable world.

POCKET POWER

OR HOW THE SP COULD HOLD NINTENDO'S FATE IN ITS TINY HANDS



It's already sold out in Japan and will no doubt do the same in every territory it enters. Why? Because the GBA SP is an extremely impressive piece of hardware, of course. Leaning far less towards the toy market and more towards a mobile phone/PDA buying-public, the updated hardware addresses most of the concerns raised about the original Advance. But does it have what it takes to bring mobile gaming to a whole new audience?

In theory it should; the two models now cover both the toy and the gadget markets and many people who have avoided the system due to the dark screen or battery issues may now be coaxed into joining the ever-growing Game Boy army. With the right software support, Nintendo's dedication to portable gaming could keep it afloat no matter what the fate of the GameCube. With the *Pokémon* games and the SEGA mobile onslaught later in the year, 2003 could very well be the year of the Game Boy.

PIE IN THE SKY

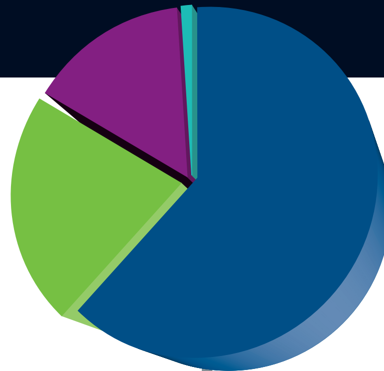
FACTS AND FIGURES FROM GAMING LAND

As two of the biggest-selling games of mid-February, *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance* and *FIFA 2003* really epitomise multi-format gaming, making themselves available on at least four platforms each. But which versions are selling best? Go figure…

Runaway leader on both counts is Sony's machine which, taking into account the installed base, is almost a given. The figures tend to get more interesting at the lower end of the spectrum, with both of Nintendo's machines propping up the charts for both games. Quite embarrassingly, *FIFA* isn't the only title where the GameCube version is being outsold by the PSone edition.

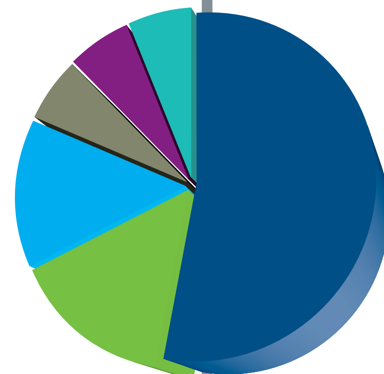
Elsewhere in the charts, the same is also true of *Harry Potter* and *Tony Hawk's 4*, the PSone versions of which somehow still manage to outsell their GameCube counterparts by a ratio of at least 2:1. Curiously, the PSone also narrowly beats the GameCube on software value sold for the same seven-day period, despite the former selling predominantly budget titles. It looks as though Sony could have Konami and its dancing-induced sales hysteria to thank for this.

Promising news though for Microsoft – it would seem that their value bundles are finally beginning to push the Xbox to the masses, and while it's nowhere near the dizzy heights of Sony's multi-million seller, some respectable performances are being put in. That said, it's interesting to note that the number three title in the Xbox sales chart for the same week – *Halo: Combat Evolved*, which hasn't left that chart since the console launched – doesn't even feature in the cross-platform Top 40. A sign, perhaps, that while Xbox may be currently ahead of Nintendo's machine, it still has a long way to go.



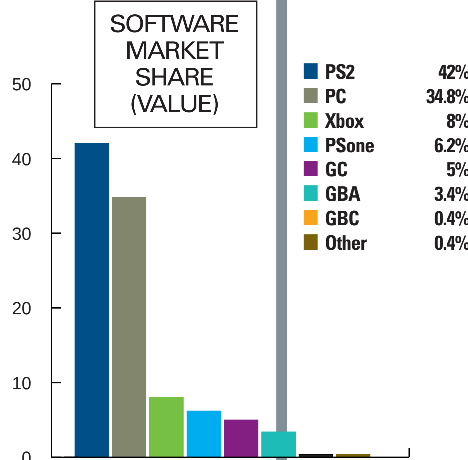
MK:DA SALES BREAKDOWN

PS2	62%
Xbox	22%
GC	15%
GBA	1%



FIFA SALES BREAKDOWN

PS2	53%
Xbox	15%
PSone	14%
PC	6%
GC	6%
GBA	6%



SOFTWARE MARKET SHARE (VALUE)

PS2	42%
PC	34.8%
Xbox	8%
PSone	6.2%
GC	5%
GBA	3.4%
GBC	0.4%
Other	0.4%


FIFA

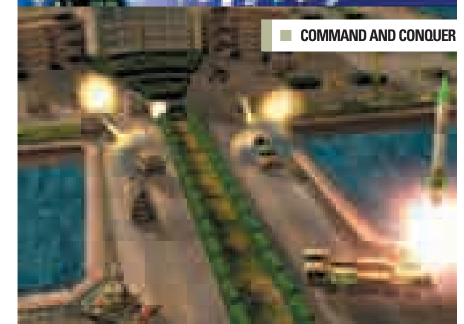

HALO

UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	The Sims	EA Games	PC, PS2
2	Command And Conquer: Generals	EA Games	PC
3	Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance	Midway	GBA, GC, PS2, Xbox
4	The Getaway	Take 2	PS2
5	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	SCEE	PS2
6	FIFA 2003	EA Sports	GBA, GC, PC, PSone, PS2, Xbox
7	Unreal II: The Awakening	Infogrames	PC
8	Dancing Stage: Party Edition	Konami	PSone
9	Lord Of The Rings: The Two Towers	EA Games	GBA, PS2
10	Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath Of Cortex	Vivendi	GC, PS2, Xbox

■ EA's stranglehold over the UK sales charts shows no signs of weakening. In fact, its highest new entry, *C&C: Generals* (a PC exclusive), somehow managed to outsell Midway's four-


THE SIMS


COMMAND AND CONQUER


MORTAL KOMBAT

The Greatest Story Ever Told...

Are complex storylines ruining the purity of videogames or are they adding an extra dimension to otherwise tired genres? If you've ever watched a cut-scene you need to read this...

It seems a fairly obvious distinction on paper: games are interactive entertainment while novels and films are not. Hollywood and the wider arts world has never seemed to understand this fundamental dichotomy but in recent years it seems as if the games industry has begun to get a little hazy on the subject as well.

But if videogames are just that – games, more akin to a sport than a novel – then why do they need a story at all? And if they do have to have a storyline how do we stop programmers from trying to execute them in a hodgepodge of clichés and badly translated Japanese? Perhaps the quality of a game's script isn't



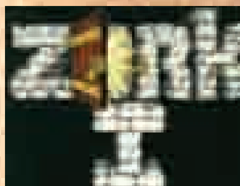

Blinx
SUPER MARIO
FIRE!
FAIRYTALES
THE CRAWFISH


The Mystery of Capital
Inflation Targeting
The ECONOMICS of GENDER
GOTTA PLAY 'EM ALL
TWO GOLDEN ARCHES
BLOOD TYPES
MORRIGAN
POLICE ETHICS
THE POLITICS of THE POLICE
I Love a Cop

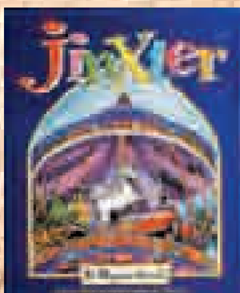


ADVENTURES WITH A GLASS CEILING

The one videogame genre where story truly was king is now but a distant memory. Portrayed and interacted with solely via text descriptions (and latterly the odd static image), titles such as Infocom's *Zork* and *Planetfall* or Magnetic Scrolls' *Jinxter* and *The Pawn* were telling real stories across multiple genres on 8-bit machines like the Commodore 64 and Apple II. Indeed, so well-crafted was Infocom's output that author Douglas Adams was convinced to write a couple (and his own efforts seemed only marginally better in comparison). Of course, entirely text-based games were never going to be anything but an evolutionary hiccup, but it's tragic how few modern games have learned from these ancient masters of interactive fiction.



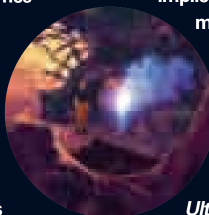




TEXT HEAVY Early text adventures relied solely on their plots to keep gamers interested.

even the real issue – nobody seems to have avoided buying *Resident Evil* because of the terrible dialogue. The real priority may simply be preventing a storyline from turning games players into games watchers.

Have complex storylines become the norm simply just because everyone's using them, or are people enjoying them as much as the actual game? Has papering over lulls in gameplay with cut-scenes been so successful that gamers like the icing as much as the cake? After all, when people start complaining that the story in *Super Mario Sunshine* isn't elaborate enough it's clear that expectations have changed.



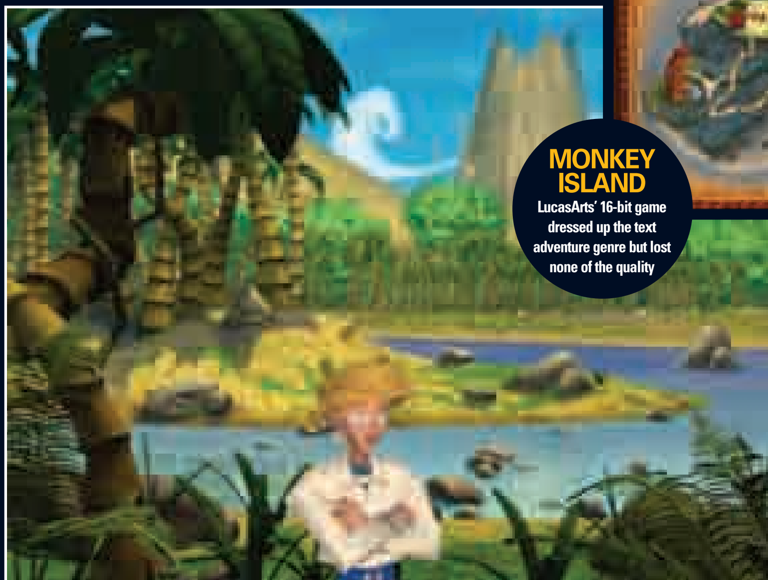


For most of the 8- and 16-bit era it's difficult to think of a major franchise that had a real story. From *Space Invaders* to *Pac-Man*, from *Mario* to *Sonic*, if a game actually bothered with a plot then it made sure it could be explained in a single sentence, and even then it bore little or no resemblance to anything that actually happened in the game. "A good storyline is completely inessential to your average non-RPG game," says Steven Poole, author of *Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames*. "The heart of any game is the depth and complexity of the interaction with the system." Few would disagree with this, but as Sean Clark, a project leader at LucasArts, points out: "Even the most minimalist shoot-'em-up implies a plot structure by explaining the mission goals. 'Destroy all the crates before Captain Nefarious can have them loaded on the transport' may be the only story you get for an entire level, but it's more compelling than 'Destroy all the crates'."

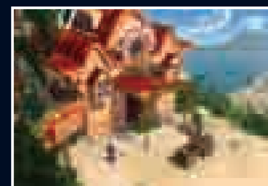
Even early role-playing games such as *Ultima* included the same old simplistic background stories, giving a perfunctory excuse for the in-game action to anyone nerdish enough to read the manual. This suggests that it's not the genre that determines whether developers think a story is necessary, it's the internal complexity of a particular title. And due to the technical limitations of the 8- and 16-bit machines the impetus was never really there. But now that the Pandora's box has been opened and every man and his beat-'em-up has got a plotline, developers have to

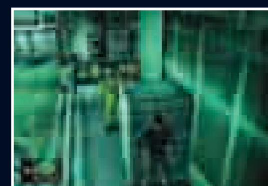


MONKEY ISLAND LucasArts' 16-bit game dressed up the text adventure genre but lost none of the quality



MONKEY BUSINESS *The Secret Of Monkey Island* blended things to do, things to see and a logical storyline too.

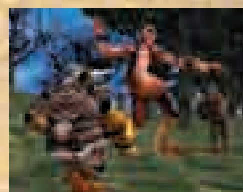


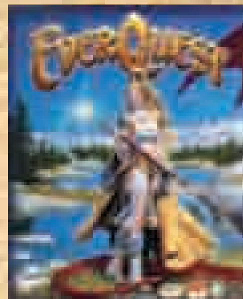


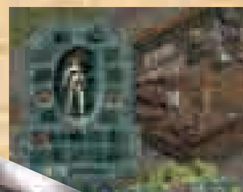


ONLINE STORIES

Developers have enough trouble with storylines in single-player games but one issue that is only now beginning to be addressed is how to tell a story online with multiple players. A quick deathmatch might not need much in terms of exposition, but, as most MMORPGs are already finding out, people get bored pretty quickly unless there's not only an ongoing storyline but also, as *Dark Age Of Camelot* has been experimenting with, shorter, more obviously interactive sub-plots and quests. It could be that the problems of storytelling in video games are only just beginning…



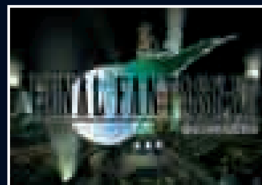


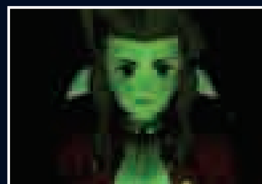




WEAVING WEB STORIES
Massively Multiplayer Online RPGs need logical, in-depth stories to keep thousands of internet gamers happy. Will developers be able to provide and sustain them?









FINAL FANTASY
A classic of the 32-bit era, *FF7* was let down by dodgy, badly translated dialogue

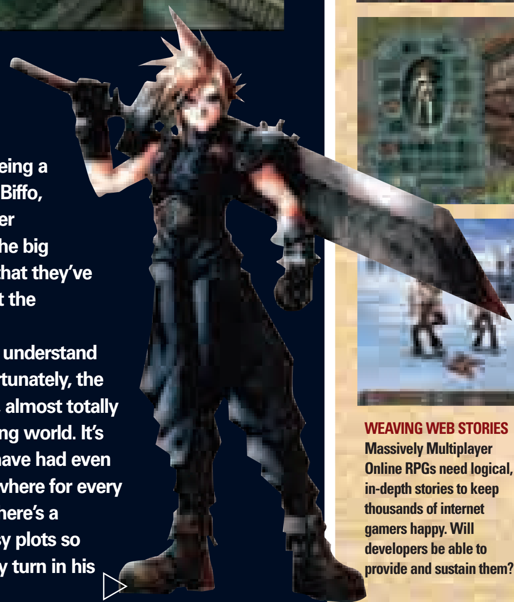
work out how to make them of sufficient quality to avoid lynch mobs of angry English teachers. Not that this was a problem in the old days…

Speech Impediments

Although the text adventure was always doomed to a short life (see the Glass Ceiling boxout), its immediate offspring, the graphic adventure, has survived. Gaining a breakthrough with *The Secret Of Monkey Island* for 16-bit computers, LucasArts showed that the spirit of the text adventure could live on with moving graphics and even better dialogue. And this really was quality dialogue by any standard, not just in videogame terms. But how did Sean Clark and his peers manage to produce work that was so far above the competition, and who did they find was best suited to write a good game script: the developers themselves or professional script-writers? "Neither and both," is Clark's answer.

"This actually hits on a couple of my pet peeves," he says. "One is the would-be writer, usually a developer, who can't even be bothered to run the spell-checker much less acknowledge that there's an actual skill involved in the process. The other is the professional writer who won't make the effort to appreciate how telling a story in a game may be different from other forms of entertainment. Some of the best writing I've seen has come from two sources: developers that can actually write, and collaborations between developers and professional writers in which each party works closely with one another."

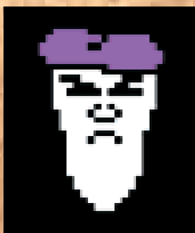
Even though he admits to not being a LucasArts fan, Paul Rose (a.k.a. Mr Biffo, the man behind Channel 4's Digitiser Teletext pages) seems to agree: "The big problem with game developers is that they've got all this technological power but the majority haven't come from a film background," he says. "They don't understand basic storytelling principles." Unfortunately, the adventure game exists in a bubble, almost totally removed from the rest of the gaming world. It's amazing how little influence they have had even on RPGs, particularly in the West, where for every *Fallout* and *Planescape: Torment*, there's a hundred identikit RPGs with fantasy plots so hackneyed they'd make J.R. Hartley turn in his grave, let alone J.R.R. Tolkien. ▷



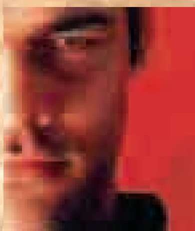


MEET THE EXPERTS

Paul Rose is Channel 4's Mr Biffo – the anarchic writer of the Digitiser Teletext pages. He is also an accomplished scriptwriter with regular contributions to both *EastEnders* and *Crossroads*, as well as several new comedy shows.



Steven Poole writes for *The Guardian*, *The Independent* and the *Times Literary Supplement*, and has also worked as a composer for television and short film. He is the author of the widely acclaimed book *Trigger Happy: The Inner Life Of Videogames*.



Sean Clark started work at LucasArts as a programmer, before becoming project leader, writer and game designer on *Sam & Max Hit The Road*, *The Dig* and *Escape From Monkey Island*. He is currently working on *Full Throttle II*.



IN THE KNOW Stories in games are becoming increasingly important, leading to developers working with scriptwriters such as Paul Rose to ensure the in-game dialogue isn't laughable.

Thankfully, by the 32-bit era, games were becoming profitable enough that developers could spend the money to get the job done properly – except they didn't. The three 32-bit games most (in)famous for their stories were *Resident Evil*, *Final Fantasy VII* and *Metal Gear Solid* – all written by the games' developers and all with enough Z-grade dialogue to make even Ed Wood blanch. As Rose puts it: "I'm yet to play a game where I haven't wanted to skip through the cut-scenes".

Solid Snake's capers in particular have been reviled for their overwrought and barely lucid rants on war and the Internet. And don't forget the 15-minute cut-scenes full of sub-TV movie quality dialogue. But Poole doesn't agree. "*MGS* and particularly *MGS2* evince the kind of playful generic reflexivity that is absent from your straight-to-video pot boiler," he says, "and if they still have cringeworthy moments of sentimentality, I can remember having watched many films of a far lower quality."

The PSone's holy trinity of plot-heavy classics are, of course, all Japanese in origin and so always have the excuse that much of their subtler prose was lost in translation. Indeed, translating from English to Japanese is usually done in two stages – a direct translation and then 'naturalisation' to ensure it makes sense. But this doesn't always happen when translating in the other direction, which, in extreme circumstances, can lead to the likes of *Zero Wing* (see right).



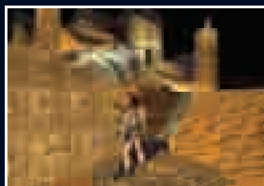
Happy Ever After

As far as Western games go, the two titles that have had the greatest impact on storytelling are *Deus Ex* and *Half-Life*, each with a completely different approach. "*Half-Life* is one of my favourite ever games," says Paul Rose. "Even though the plot was really thin and there wasn't much characterisation, you really felt as if you were this guy in the game world and the little set-pieces were pushing you along." *Deus Ex*, by comparison, has a much denser storyline and real characters who develop according to your actions. In terms of an interactive storyline it's probably the most impressive effort yet made, but it wasn't nearly as successful *Half-Life*. The influence of *Half-Life* is much easier to plot, especially since it shares many ties with that other master of the understated storyline: *The Legend Of Zelda*.

LINK'S LIFE Unlike many games, *Zelda*'s cut-scenes help progress the plot.







ZELDA The storylines in the legendary *Zelda* games aren't just for fun – they help to push the player along





KEEPING QUIET For a super-sneaky kinda guy, Solid Snake didn't half go on – he spoke out at great length about war being A Bad Thing and the Internet being full of junk.

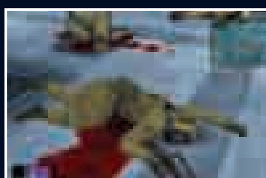




METAL GEAR

Many gamers felt that *MGS*'s top-notch stealth action was spoilt by the long cut-scenes and poor dialogue

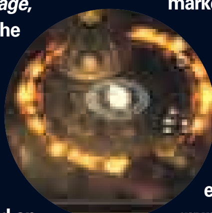




Although *Half-Life* and *Zelda*'s plots seem wafer-thin on paper, they do work – not as entertainment in their own right, but as a catalyst for the player's actions. The mini cut-scenes also have specific gameplay functions: giving clues to puzzles, covering up changes in backdrops or abilities and pushing the player on with hints of further rewards. It is this amalgam of traditional story-telling techniques and gameplay mechanics that is perhaps the most palatable to the majority of gamers.



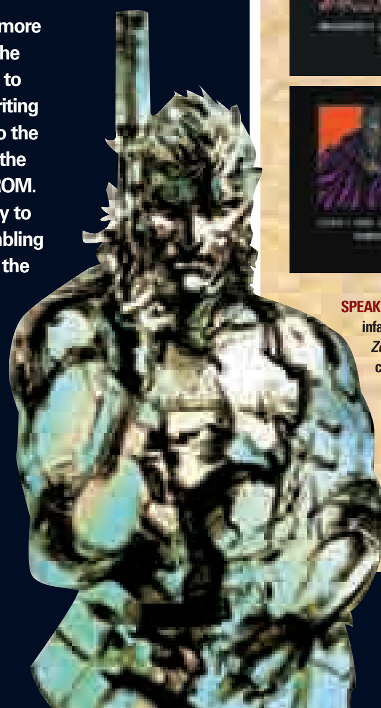
Looking to the future it's difficult to see many new titles that are really taking creative advantage of this renewed interest in storytelling. Zed Two's tactical RPG *Pillage*, which Paul Rose is scripting, is one of the brave few. Things didn't begin too well though: "When I started I wasn't happy with the work I was doing – it was all soundbites and clichés," admits Rose. "I was writing it like a videogame and I had to start again – give the story a beginning, a middle and an end; introduce character arcs and all the usual stuff I'm used to doing for TV scripts." The game looks intriguing with interesting, believable characters that develop through the game and, perhaps most importantly, are drawn with a minimum of cut-scenes.



But the experimentation of *Pillage* is an exception; most new games only tack on storylines because gamers expect them. But again, the question arises of why? Why now? It's not as if some amazing game has just been released that has an integrated storyline so good it's made all rivals look weak in comparison. The most likely conclusion is that gamers are responding to more complex games by demanding more complex plots to justify them. The games industry's task is not just to satisfy them with quality scriptwriting but also to ensure it doesn't slip into the mire of interactive movies that plagued the market on the introduction of the CD-ROM.

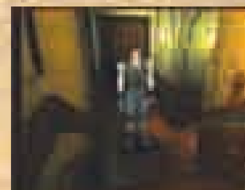
Or perhaps that's the wrong way to look at it. Maybe these first stumbling steps in interactive fiction point the way towards a new genre that is half game, half novel.

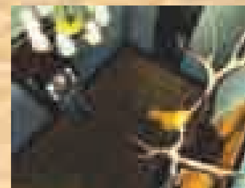
Perhaps a new medium will emerge that will stop gamers grumbling at intrusive cut-scenes and the literati smirking at cheesy dialogue. Whatever happens, it seems likely that future justification for alien genocide will at least be put forward in a more erudite fashion. Lacklustre plots and dialogue? You have no chance to survive.



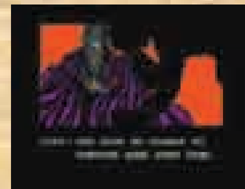
SOMEBODY SET UP US THE BOMB

The award for worst dialogue in a game ever is one that can be awarded with little controversy. However bad the original *Resident Evil* may be, no matter how hard you've laughed at Barry Burton calling Jill the "master of unlocking", nothing is as awe-inspiringly dire as obscure Mega Drive shoot-'em-up *Zero Wing*. Solely responsible for the All Your Base geek phenomenon, the lack of skill that has gone into translating the intro's few short sentences is breathtaking. To remind yourself of the whole preposterous affair check out www.planettribes.com/allyourbase/



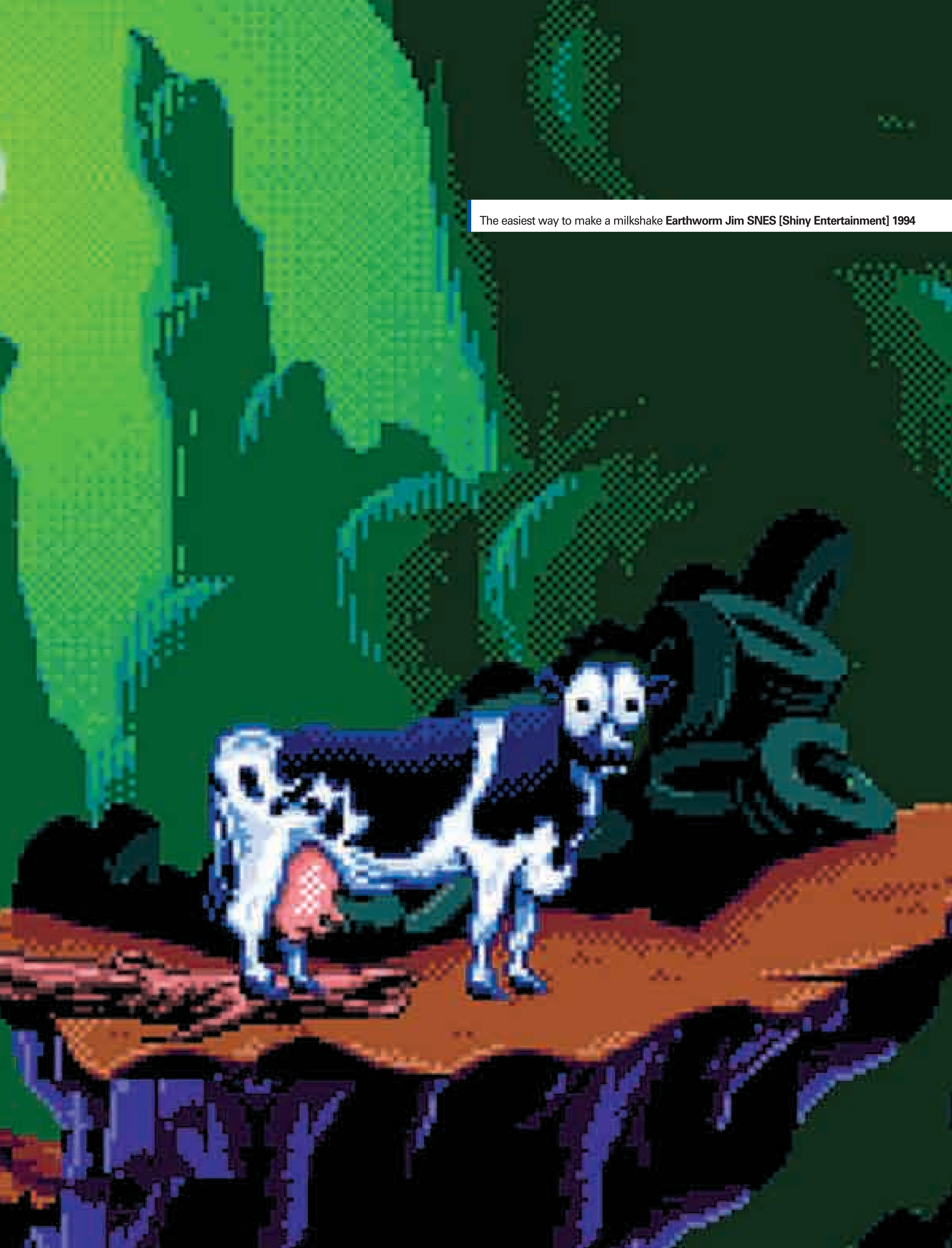






SPEAKING IN TONGUES The infamously bad dialogue in *Zero Wing* has gained a cult following, prompting an Internet craze for reporting 'sightings' of CATS' dire warnings in everyday Earth locations. Some people have too much free time…


x3
100%
x931


The easiest way to make a milkshake **Earthworm Jim SNES [Shiny Entertainment] 1994**

ZONE OF THE ENDERS: THE 2ND RUNNER

Unlike the slightly repetitive cityscapes from the original game, the sequel sets the action against a wide variety of locales and backdrops.

While it's not exactly what many of us would call 'cel-shaded', *ZOE2* features a unique graphical style that looks truly gorgeous.

"IT'S NOT TYPICAL CEL-SHADING, YOU SEE – I HAD DOUBTS IN THE BEGINNING BUT AS WE KEPT ON WORKING ON THE LOOK, IT BECAME BETTER AND BETTER"
YOJI SHINKAWA, DESIGNER, KONAMI

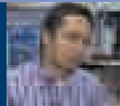
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

DISMANTLING ZONE OF THE ENDERS: THE 2ND RUNNER



ZOE MGS2 MORE ROBOTS ZOE 2

Some of the boss battles are particularly frantic and require a swift mastery of your mech's new abilities if you want to emerge unscathed.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Since joining Konami back in 1994 as a designer on *Policenauts: Private Collection*, Yoji Shinkawa has worked on two of the company's most successful franchises – *Zone Of The Enders* and *Metal Gear Solid*. His unique artistic style is most prominently showcased in the *MGS* games as he was responsible for practically all the character design.

HISTORY

■ **METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE** 2002 [PS2]
■ **ZONE OF THE ENDERS** 2001 [PS2]
■ **METAL GEAR SOLID** 1998 [PSone]

THE ORIGINAL WAS ALL STYLE AND NO SUBSTANCE – CAN THE SEQUEL DO BETTER?



■ Despite all the explosions, *ZOE2* actually has a plot. No, really.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: April '03
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

■ Massive robotic mech suits duking it out in a land far, far away – exactly what you'd want from the sequel to *ZOE*, but with bells on.

***Winning Eleven 6, Dancing Stage: Party Edition, ISS3*... has Konami got any original content left, or is it just constantly updating its football and dancing titles?** Even *Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance* and *Silent Hill 2: Director's Cut* were just improvements on existing products rather than something revolutionary. Dammit Konami, we want something new and we want it now. Thankfully, it looks like the company's first entirely new non-Disney product for some time (appearing in the form of a sequel to a PS2 launch title) could be something very special indeed.

Even if you're not familiar with *Zone Of The Enders*, you can probably guess from the pictures that it's got something to do with robots – big robots armed to the teeth with heavy weaponry, trying to blast each other out of the sky. And you'd be absolutely right, up to a point. This being a title developed by some of the creative geniuses behind *Metal Gear Solid*, it won't come as much of a shock to learn that there's more to it than that in terms of plot.

Setting itself several years after the first game, *Zone Of The Enders: The 2nd Runner* still has you behind the controls of the mech known as Jehuty, but this time you could be the last hope for peace between the warring colonies on Earth and Mars, rather than just trying to save your own sorry skin. It's got drama, conflict and even some faces that you might recognise from the original… the kind of thing you'd expect from the people behind *MGS2*. Saying that though, it's also got a whole ton of intimidating mechs, explosions and fast-paced robot-fighting action which is the bit that we're really interested in.

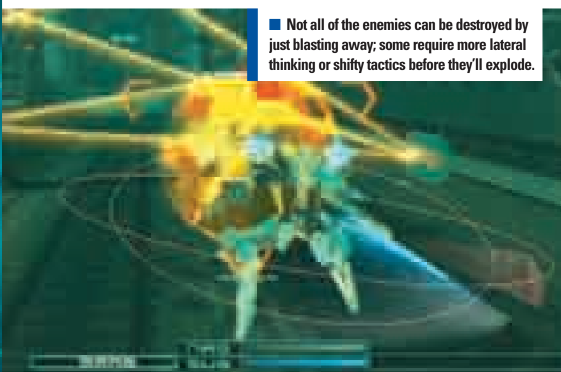
Although the basic structure of *ZOE2* remains faithful to the first game (gravity-free robots known as Orbital Frames, scrapping it out high above various landscapes), Konami assures us that they've made some very important enhancements. The most obvious of these has to be the graphics – having originally featured a very clean, sharp look in keeping with the robotic style of the subject matter, *ZOE2* has a slightly softer style and even incorporates some cel-shaded animation on things like smoke and flames.

Visuals aside, most of the changes seem to revolve around the new skills and abilities of the Jehuty suit; as well as all the moves that it had before, a number of new ones (both offensive and defensive) have been added. Grabbing enemies, for example, is now no longer just a case of holding them still while you attack – you can use them as a shield to block laser fire, brandish them like a weapon or just toss them into a cluster of enemy targets – the choice is yours. This, combined with various charge moves and lock-on abilities, helps to vary the gameplay slightly over what *ZOE*'s last outing had to offer.

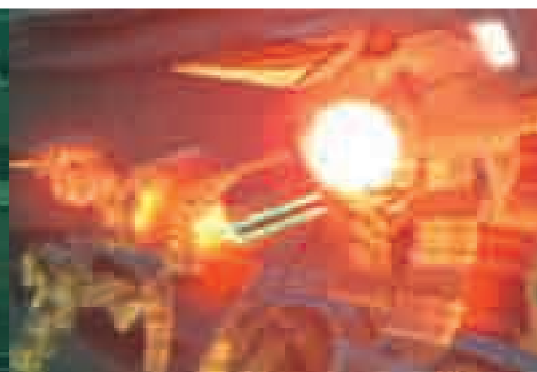
Of course, the biggest problem that the first game suffered from was that while it all looked very pretty, there wasn't very much to it – the gameplay got a bit monotonous and the whole thing was over far too quickly. Konami insists that these problems have been ironed out but, having only sampled the first few levels of the game so far, we can't confirm that's the case. Still, what we have seen certainly seems more impressive than *ZOE* thanks in part to the wider variety of level locations and rather gorgeous graphics on offer; hopefully when we get our hands on the finished code, we'll be able to prove that these aren't the only things this sequel has going for it.



"HAVING PLAYED A FAIR AMOUNT OF ZOE2, WE'RE IMPRESSED; WE JUST HOPE THE REST OF THE GAME FULFILS THIS POTENTIAL"



■ Not all of the enemies can be destroyed by just blasting away; some require more lateral thinking or shifty tactics before they'll explode.





■ It seems that this robust robot (codenamed Anubis) is the lead bad guy – he's a mean mofo mech.

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4

THE PRAYERS OF FOOTBALL FANS EVERYWHERE ARE ABOUT TO BE ANSWERED

According to the proverb, all things come to those who wait. That will certainly ring true with any *Championship Manager* fan at the moment, with the latest instalment of the hugely popular football management sim subjected to a seemingly endless string of delays. Originally pencilled in for release last October, Sports Interactive and Eidos have decided to hold the game back in order to get everything right – but then, they would say that. A more cynical view may well suggest that holding back the game has whipped up demand until it is approaching fever-pitch. But whatever the reason for the delays, one thing seems certain – *CM4* is going to be the biggest-selling PC game of all time in the UK.

The last instalment of the game based on the *CM3* engine was the *01/02* seasonal update – that shifted over 100,000 units in its first weekend on sale, so expectations are naturally high for the sequel. They have been raised by the recent delays (the game is now on track for a release in late March, fingers crossed) and not without due cause – *CM4* is promising some truly revolutionary new elements.

The game engine has been totally re-written from the ground up, enabling the team to take advantage of today's more powerful processors, and there are more parameters involved in deciding the outcome of a match. Aside from the 'behind the scenes' changes, however, there are some pretty noticeable ones too. The biggest of these is the introduction of a match engine for the first time in a *CM* game. Managers will now be able to watch the game unfold in 2D, with a top-down view letting you track the movements of players and tinker with tactics and instructions accordingly. It will be possible to play in text-only mode, or the match engine can be used as a 'highlights' feature, showing goals and near-misses in more detail after the game is over.

It is a radical step, and one that is already proving controversial with *Championship Manager*'s legions of fans. Whereas previous versions allowed the action to unfold in the player's head, the introduction of the match engine means that if it isn't implemented well, it could shatter any illusion of realism. However, this is not expected to be a problem. Former Eire international and Liverpool footballer Ray Houghton has joined the team specifically to ensure that the 2D representation of football is as realistic as possible, and the simple graphical presentation still allows room for plenty of imagination to be used by the player.

Elsewhere, youth football is being given a greater emphasis in *CM4*, with a fully functional youth set-up included. Managers will be able to run the U-19 side if they so desire, as well as the reserves, and the flow of players making the grade from the youth team should therefore be better than the occasional promotion from the youth academy that *CM3* allowed for.

Over 160,000 players will feature in the game, with 39 (count 'em) leagues implemented from as far afield as India and South Africa, allowing for a depth and detail never seen before in a football management game. It isn't hard to see why football fans have been getting so excited about getting their hands on a copy, and the good news is that it seems the wait has been worth it. Look out for a full review next issue, and you'd better book a couple of weeks off work – this is one game that you'll want to play for hours and hours at a sitting. We promise.



DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Eidos
DEVELOPER: Sports Interactive
RELEASE: 28 March
GENRE: Sports Management
PLAYERS: 1

The biggest football management game of all time is back. Get ready to kiss your friends, job and missus goodbye for a few weeks at least.

TACTICAL GENIUS

This incarnation of *Championship Manager* gives you more control than ever. Training is split into fifteen different areas, such as weight-training and set-pieces, so players can improve specific skills. Individual players can have their mentality altered to be more aggressive, and most of the instructions from *CM3* now have extra parameters. For example, a player won't just be told to get crosses in, but whether to do so from deep, or skin the full-back and get to the by-line first. It's even possible to specify how many players should be put in the wall when facing a free kick. So now there'll be no excuses and the manager will have to take full responsibility for those disastrous results…

"ONE THING SEEMS CERTAIN – CM4 IS GOING TO BE THE BIGGEST-SELLING PC GAME OF ALL TIME IN THE UK"



You can check match highlights after the game, or watch it unfold live with the new match engine.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Paul Collyer founded Sports Interactive with his brother Oliver when they decided to see if they could find a publisher for the football management game they had written in their bedroom for fun. After many rejections, Domark (now Eidos) agreed to publish *Championship Manager* and a legend was born…

HISTORY

- **CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER QUIZ** 2002 [PC, PSone]
- **CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER** 2001 [PC]
- **CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 3** 1999 [PC]



You'll need to acknowledge your fans' complaints. And possibly those of your partner, family, friends…



Halo it ain't – but millions find this more exciting than offing evil terrorists or sneaking around in the dark.

"PART OF THE BEAUTY OF CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER IS THAT YOU GET LOST IN THE IMAGINATION OF IT ALL"

MILES JACOBSEN, SPORTS INTERACTIVE

Okay, so it doesn't look much but trust us – this game will eat up your life, and you won't mind.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THE MAKE-UP FOR THIS ONE COULDN'T BE SIMPLER


EXCEL SPREADSHEET

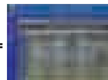
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FOOTBALL

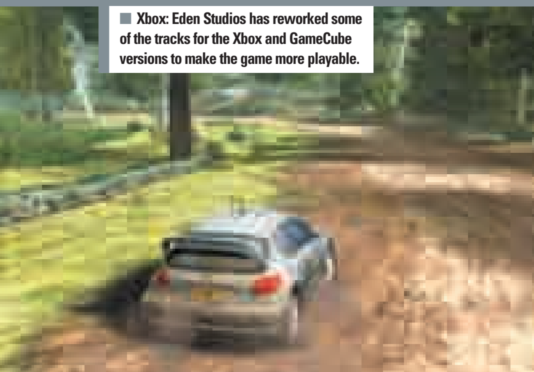
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ANGRY GIRLFRIEND

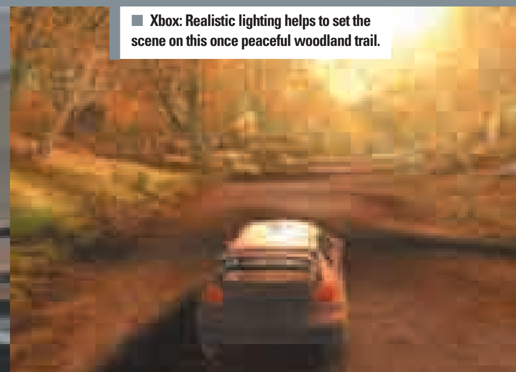
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CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4

V-RALLY 3


Xbox: Eden Studios has reworked some of the tracks for the Xbox and GameCube versions to make the game more playable.




Xbox: Realistic lighting helps to set the scene on this once peaceful woodland trail.

SHOULD COLIN BE WORRIED? DEPENDS WHAT YOU WANT FROM A RALLY GAME…

Like so many so-called PlayStation2 'exclusive' titles, *V-Rally 3* will soon be available on GameCube and Xbox. Of course, such translations often end up being nothing more than hurried cash-ins, failing to take advantage of the extra graphical capabilities on offer and subsequently performing poorly at retail. However, Infogrames assures us that developer Eden Studios has "totally overhauled and refined the in-game special effects" in order to make the most of Nintendo and Microsoft's superior hardware.

For starters, there are obvious differences with the video output; both GameCube and Xbox are capable of producing distinctly sharper visuals than Sony's machine and that shows here. The new versions also benefit from improved textures and filtering, resulting in crisper details with none of the shimmering that affected some scenery in the PS2 game. On top of that, most of the other visual effects (such as churned-up dust and snow) have been improved and now blend much more naturally within the game's environments.

And it's not just the visuals that have been improved – the tracks have been broadened and the car handling tweaked to make the game more user-friendly. You see, while PS2 *V-Rally 3* was a blast to play, the speed of the game combined with the narrowness of some of the later tracks made negotiating some tight bends almost impossible. It wasn't such a problem on open courses, but roads with high walls or dense forest on either side had restricted visibility to an almost unplayable degree. Such problems certainly seem to have been addressed in the Xbox and GameCube preview code, though we'll reserve judgement until we've played the later stages in the complete version.

GameCube owners will no doubt rejoice at the prospect of a decent racing game on their system – *F-Zero* and *Mario Kart* should be great when they arrive, but so far there isn't really anything worth shouting about. By contrast, Xbox owners already have a selection of quality racing games to choose from, including *Project Gotham Racing*, *RalliSport Challenge* and the wonderful *Colin McRae Rally 3*. In all fairness though, *V-Rally 3* offers a slightly different experience to each, in that it successfully blends the high-speed thrills of an arcade game with the subtlety and precision of a simulator. Watch out for an update on the GameCube and Xbox versions of *V-Rally 3* in the coming months.



"V-RALLY 3 SUCCESSFULLY BLENDS THE HIGH-SPEED THRILLS OF AN ARCADE GAME WITH THE SUBTLETY OF A SIMULATOR"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, GC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Infogrames
DEVELOPER: Eden Studios
RELEASE: April (Xbox), June (GC) (Japan:TBA/ US: TBA)
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-4 (consecutively)

This is the third instalment in Infogrames' popular rally series. Although realistic to an extent, *V-Rally* titles have always preferred the arcade way of doing things – fast, exciting and fun to play.


GameCube: Sand and dust catch the light and glow in a cloud behind the car.


eMag

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

AN EVEN LONGER TIME AGO, IN A GALAXY FURTHER AWAY…

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: BioWare/LucasArts
RELEASE: April TBC (Xbox), September TBC (PC)
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

■ A story-led action/adventure that includes just about every good RPG element and blends them with the myriad rich fantasy environments from the *Star Wars* movies.

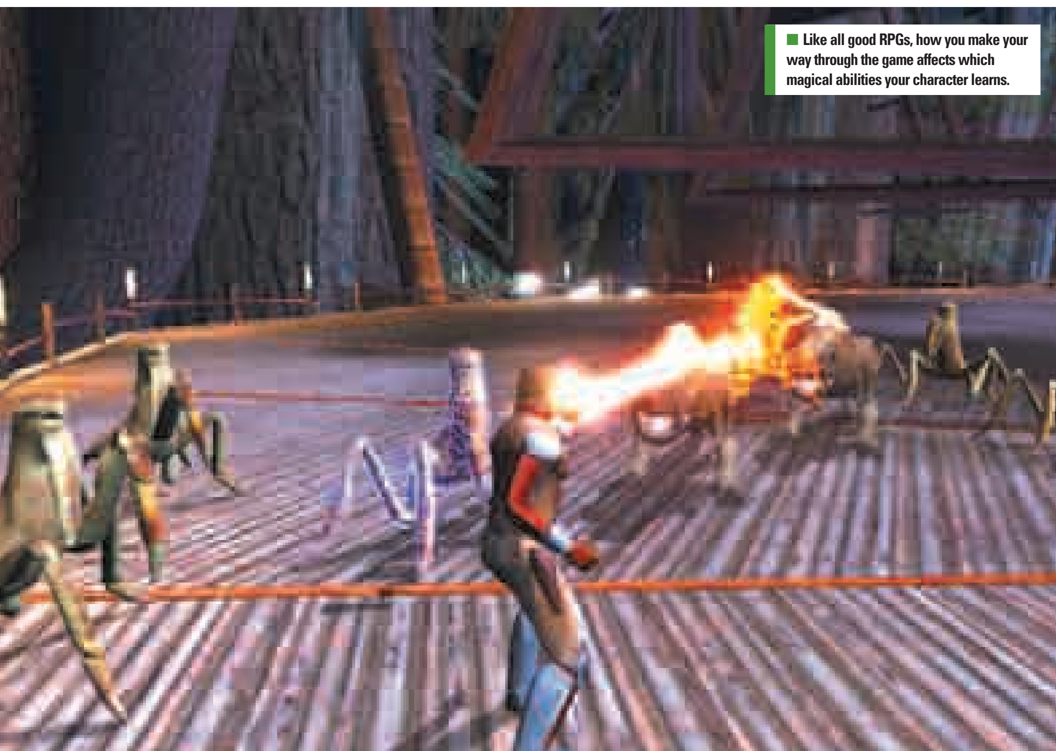
Despite releasing many, many titles, LucasArts' videogames rarely, if ever, live up to the quality of the *Star Wars* movies. Over the past few years we've seen such beauties as *Star Wars Episode 1: Obi Wan* and, more recently, *Star Wars Bounty Hunter*, which managed to achieve a measly 3/10 in **games**™ issue 2. But software producer Mike Gallo is aware that the company doesn't have the in-house talent to create some types of games…

"Several years ago, LucasArts made a commitment to going out and finding the best developers in the world to work on products," he says. "We wanted to explore genres that we couldn't do in-house. One of the things that had been talked about for many years internally was a *Star Wars* role-playing game, but we didn't have the internal experience to do that stuff." Of course, creating successful RPGs is a difficult task – aside from a handful of Japanese companies, there are few developers with the necessary skills. "We went out to look for a team and BioWare was our first choice because they are the premier RPG developer in North America, if not the world," says Gallo. Indeed, BioWare does seem to be pretty much the only Western developer with the ability to balance player stats, story and action to produce critically and commercially successful RPG titles. Over the last few years, the company has been responsible for such monumental titles as *Neverwinter Nights* and *Baldur's Gate*.

"Basically it was a phone call," reveals Gallo. "Our president Simon Jeffries called Greg Zeschuk and Ray Muzyka up at BioWare and said 'Hey, we'd like to talk about doing this game'." Although the initial consultation between the two companies was surprisingly relaxed, the idea of collaborating was just as thrilling for BioWare as it was for LucasArts. "To get a call from LucasArts asking if we'd like to do a *Star Wars* game was very exciting," admits *SW:KOTOR*'s producer, Casey Hudson. "Everyone around the company was really hoping that they were able to work on it once the deal was settled." And now, after two years of research and development, most of the company is indeed working on *SW:KOTOR* in order to get the title finished in time for a summer release.

"We talked to BioWare about doing it in a particular time period which is 4,000 years prior to *Episode 1*, but the entire storyline and design has all been created by the team at BioWare," Gallo points out. "The game is not multiplayer – it's a single-player experience only," adds Hudson. "The main reason for choosing to do a single-player game is that we wanted to have a story that can be on the same scale as the movies. We want to make the character you're playing the star of that story and really affect the galaxy, and the only way to properly do that is to make it a single player experience."

"WHILE MANY PEOPLE WILL ENJOY WHAT'S ON OFFER, IT'S FANS OF THE MOVIES THAT WILL BE IMPRESSED BY THIS THE MOST"



■ Like all good RPGs, how you make your way through the game affects which magical abilities your character learns.

HOURS OF FUN

As you'd hope for from an epic RPG, *Star Wars: KOTOR* is going to be a huge game that lasts for many hours. In fact, LucasArts describes the game as "gigantic", and predicts that there'll be between 40 and 60 hours of gameplay in the finished product. "We're referring to worlds as gameplay areas," says LucasArts' Mike Gallo. "It's difficult to break it up depending on how you count it because we have these giant things that we call worlds, but within each one of those worlds you may have up to 20 different areas to go to. We've also wanted to create a lot of replayability, so one of the key story elements of the game is that your character can subtly make choices through the game that will lean them to the dark or the light side of the force. As you lean one way or the other, that may or may not open up other sub-quests. There are also male and female characters and there are some specific things to that aspect as well – specific quests and romances – things like that."



PRODUCER PROFILE

Mike Gallo has worked in the videogames industry for a good number of years, covering a range of roles from Quality Assurance all the way through to Games Producer. After working on a number of games at Konami, Mike now oversees many of the major LucasArts projects.

HISTORY

- **STAR WARS: RACER REVENGE** 2002 [PS2]
- **SILENT HILL** 1999 [PSone]
- **TINY TOON ADVENTURES 2** 1994 [Game Boy]

If you wish, you can leave your team to their own devices. Alternatively, you can control every move they make.

"TO GET A CALL FROM LUCASARTS ASKING IF WE'D LIKE TO DO A STAR WARS GAME WAS VERY EXCITING"

CASEY HUDSON, PRODUCER, BIOWARE

As well as stunning lightsaber battles, *KOTOR* also makes good use of all the other Jedi tricks and magic.

The current hardware generation allows for some impressive battle scenes. Eight detailed characters on-screen at once? Not bad.

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC CONT.



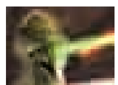
Just like in the movies, there are many kinds of droids performing specific tasks.



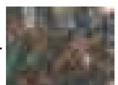
This area has a wonderful sensation of being high in the clouds. Just like the films, in fact.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

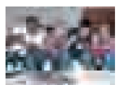
THE FORCE IS STRONG WITH THIS FUSION OF GOODNESS


STAR WARS

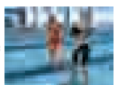
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BALDUR'S GATE

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MULTIPLAYER

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SW:KOTOR

"THE FIRST TIME THAT PEOPLE FIRE UP A LIGHTSABER AND ACTUALLY ENGAGE IN SOME LIGHTSABER COMBAT IS GOING TO BE A PRETTY GOOD MOMENT FOR THE FANS"

MIKE GALLO, PRODUCER, LUCASARTS

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

XBOX/MULTIFORMAT



PRODUCER PROFILE

■ Having worked as both a designer and programmer, Casey Hudson now works as a producer and is overseeing the development of *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic* at BioWare. During his time at the company, he's worked on many of the firm's best-known titles.

HISTORY

- **NEVERWINTER NIGHTS** 2002 [PC]
- **BALDUR'S GATE II: SHADOW OF AMN** 2000 [PC]
- **MDK2** 2000 [Dreamcast]

"STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC LOOKS SET TO BE ONE OF THE VIDEOGAME HIGHLIGHTS OF THIS YEAR"

Of course, because BioWare can't just go around blowing-up famous *Star Wars* planets willy-nilly, the company has been forced to make a few artistic decisions regarding which locations are included in the game. "We've chosen a few of the *Star Wars* locations that we wanted players to be able to explore," says Gallo. "With the timeline we wanted to be able to take things that people would have seen in the movies and look at how they would have been 4,000 years earlier. We want the player to actually be able to affect how they came to be the way they were in the movie."

BioWare is also hoping to include a few places that have been spoken of in the movies, but never actually visited. "On Tatooine, for example, you get to go to the desert," Gallo explains. "Then there are other things you may have heard of in the movies like the Wookie home-world of Kashyyyk, which games haven't gone to before. And then there are a few locations that we've actually created specifically for the game – mainly so we can have a lot of fun with the story in a way that we can really have the character affect the galaxy without really affecting the *Star Wars* timeline."

ONE GAME, TWO FORMATS

The Xbox version of *KOTOR* leads the way by four months and has a planned launch date of April/May. Because of this, a number of extra areas are thought to be in development for the PC version and, although LucasArts won't confirm the details right now, this extra content should be available to Xbox owners via Xbox Live. On top of that, there will be other similarities and differences between the two versions, as BioWare's Casey Hudson explains: "A lot of console RPGs make a lot of clever optimisations – you can't save anywhere and you can't have a battle wherever you want, making it a lot easier to develop. But here we let you do all those things and you can use many items and pieces of equipment anywhere in the game. The main difference between the two versions is the interface; we're not simply making sure it works on both systems – it's going to be very carefully designed for each. So even though the underlying concept is going to be the same, the way that you interact with the PC will be very intuitive to a PC player."

But while the storyline and atmosphere will undoubtedly please *Star Wars* fans, the first thing that really hits you about the game is the visuals. Despite a choppy frame rate in the pre-production code, it's already clear that a hell of a lot of special effects have been lovingly created. The way the sun burns over the horizon, for instance, really sets this aside from other *Star Wars* games, and the majority of non-*Star Wars* titles for that matter. "We're really pushing the graphics on both systems, but their strengths are quite different," Hudson says. "On the Xbox we're doing a lot of things with the shaders and special blur effects, which the hardware is particularly strong with, but obviously it's running on a TV so the resolution really isn't there. We've been running the PC version at 1600 by 1200 and the textures are incredibly sharp."

So, with incredible graphics, a solid storyline, and BioWare's well-structured and balanced gameplay, *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic* looks set to be one of the videogame highlights of the year, as well as potentially being the best *Star Wars* game to date. And although many people will enjoy what's on offer, it's the fans of the movies that will be most impressed by this. "The first time that people fire up a lightsaber and actually engage in some lightsaber combat is going to be a pretty good moment for the fans," says Gallo, excitedly. He goes on to add: "We at LucasArts feel that we have a definite winner. One of the reasons that we wanted to work with BioWare was because of their history and reputation for making great RPGs and we feel that we've got the best one that they've made."

And, judging by what we've seen so far, we'd have to agree. The force is strong in this one…







■ Flying sections are included in the game, though it's unclear how integral these are to progression.

BRUTE FORCE

COULD THIS BE MICROSOFT'S NEW HALO? POTENTIALLY, YES…

After being touted as one of Microsoft's biggies for Xbox last year, we were horrified when we finally got the opportunity to playtest an early preview build of *Brute Force* a couple of months before Christmas. We were horrified because what was on offer was so utterly disappointing compared to what we'd been promised. Although all the elements were in place for a great game, the visuals had been cut down significantly from the early shots and a fluctuating frame rate (which at times struggled to get beyond about ten frames per second) made aiming at targets virtually impossible.

Thankfully, Microsoft (and presumably Digital Anvil) was aware that Xbox owners wouldn't be at all impressed if the game was released in the state it was and decided that more time was needed to iron out the flaws. Well, we're now into 2003 and Microsoft has confirmed (for the time being, at least) that *Brute Force* will finally be available this summer – ample time to perfect a title that could quite easily turn out to be another Xbox killer-app… we hope.

If you're not familiar with *Brute Force*, the idea is to get the four members of your squad safely through the level by using their individual strengths. In the single-player mode this is achieved either by voicing one of four basic commands at your team members, or switching characters mid-game and controlling them in real-time. The latter results in a shoot-'em-up experience similar to *Hired Guns* on the Amiga.

But where *Brute Force* really comes into its own is in the multiplayer mode, which includes both death-match and co-operative options, either split screen or via system link. In fact, Microsoft has just revealed that up to 16 players will be able to compete simultaneously (if you're lucky enough to have four consoles, four TVs, four link cables and a hub adapter, of course). But it's the four player co-operative mode that really sets this aside from its competitors – even *Halo* only offered co-op for two players simultaneously. One thing that's unique about this mode is that players can join in and leave the battle at any time, meaning that it's just as easy to pick up and play for five minutes as it is for five hours. As you'd expect, it's vital that each player makes the most of their character's abilities – snipers should hang back and take out enemies at long range, for example, while assault troopers will be much more successful at the frontline. Because of this variation, *Brute Force* offers a unique multiplayer experience that relies solely on teamwork – well, that's the theory anyway.

The only potential problem we can see is that just four areas are planned and, from what we've seen so far, they seem to be pretty generic videogame settings (lava, desert and so on) – although, to be fair, the layout and structure of each certainly seems quite varied, with numerous set pieces and standout landmarks helping to make each place individual. On top of that, Microsoft has also promised a range of downloadable extras from Xbox Live (including new multiplayer maps), so even after the appeal of the standalone game begins to wear off, lack of longevity shouldn't really be an issue.

As long as Digital Anvil manages to maintain a high frame rate during 16-player death-match battles and in the four-player co-op mode, there's every chance that *Brute Force* could turn out to be one of the surprise hits for 2003. Here's hoping…



DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Digital Anvil
RELEASE: Summer (Japan: TBA/US: April)
GENRE: Shoot-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1-16 (via system link)

■ Play this as a multiplayer stealth-'em-up or a single-player RTS with you in charge of a team of crack commandos.

FOUR TIMES THE FUN

***Brute Force* differs from other third-person shoot-'em-ups in that you have four characters to successfully navigate through each level, instead of just one. Each of these is very different from the next, offering unique strengths and weaknesses that need to be taken into account. Included in the line-up are a sniper, an assault trooper, a scout and a feral alien; the group may seem predictable, but Microsoft insists that these are "four of the baddest commandos you've ever dealt with". There's also a nice selection of weapons ranging from Mini-guns and Sonic Cannons to Flame Throwers and even Psychic Blasts. In addition to the offensive weapons, there is also a range of gizmos and gadgets including infrared goggles and various weapons upgrades. By using these the game becomes even more strategic, combining stealth elements with the group combat shoot-'em-up action.**

> "BRUTE FORCE OFFERS A UNIQUE MULTIPLAYER EXPERIENCE THAT RELIES SOLELY ON TEAMWORK"



■ Use your sniper to take out far away enemies and you'll save yourself a lot of trouble later on.



■ Success is purely down to how you use each of your team members. Snipers, for example, should hang back and take out foes from a distance.

BRUTE FORCE
XBOX



COMPANY PROFILE

■ Digital Anvil was formed in 1996 by Chris Roberts, creator of the *Wing Commander* series. In 1997 the company entered into a publishing agreement with Microsoft, before being bought outright by the American giant in 2000. Since then, the company has been listed under the Microsoft Game Studios name.

HISTORY

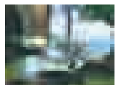
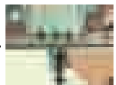
- **BRUTE FORCE** 2003 [Xbox]
- **STARLANCER** 2000 [PC]
- **WING COMMANDER** 1990 [Amiga]

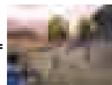
■ Early preview code revealed a few frame rate issues during the more demanding scenes. Hopefully they'll be sorted before the launch.

■ It's possible to sneak past enemies unnoticed, but if they happen to see you, you'll be lucky to come away unscathed.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

ALIEN WARFARE WITH PLENTY OF STRATEGY


HALO
+

MDK
+

RAINBOW SIX
=

BRUTE FORCE

"WE REALLY WANTED TO MAKE SURE BEFORE WE BROUGHT IT OUT THAT BRUTE FORCE COULD BE THE BEST IT COULD BE"

ERIN ROBERTS, PRODUCER, DIGITAL ANVIL

RYGAR: THE LEGENDARY ADVENTURE



■ The preview version of *Rygar* revealed a few problems with camera positioning. Hopefully this will be sorted out before release.

“TECMO HAS MANAGED TO ACHIEVE SOME WONDERFULLY DRAMATIC SCENES THROUGH CLEVER USE OF LIGHTING TEXTURE”

YET ANOTHER CLASSIC REMAKE ON ITS WAY TO PS2

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Wanadoo
DEVELOPER: Tecmo
RELEASE: 16 May (Japan: Out Now/ US: Out Now)
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

■ A hack 'n slash title set in Greece rather than Japan. Otherwise, it's a simple case of kill the monsters and save the princess.

Tecmo's *Rygar* started life as side-scrolling arcade adventure game back in 1986, before being ported across to the various home systems that were on the market at the time. Like Tecmo's *Ninja Gaiden* franchise (which is also due out in a new 3D guise this year), *Rygar* has spent a considerable time lying dormant, seemingly forgotten forever… until now.

Quite why so many big Japanese companies are choosing to resurrect their retro classics now is unclear, but we're pleased they are because many old titles deserve to be remembered and enjoyed by a new generation of gamers. Thankfully, Tecmo is considering almost all aspects of translating the 2D gameplay characteristics into 3D and, judging by the early code that we've been playing on, it would appear that the final results will be similar to *Devil May Cry*.

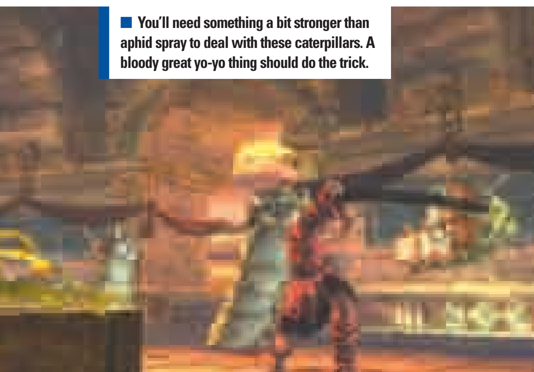
Certainly, the balance of adventure and action is almost identical to Capcom's PS2 classic, though the pace of *Rygar*'s gameplay is currently a little slower. Also, instead of the typical guns and swords you'd expect from a title like this, Rygar comes equipped with the almighty Diskarmor – basically a giant yo-yo surrounded with razor-sharp blades. This unique weapon allows for some impressive attacks, such as the ability to impale an enemy and swing him around your head to knock out any others that happen to be nearby.

A special mention also needs to go to the graphics engine which, despite suffering a little from the usual PS2 hardware problems, is actually looking very impressive indeed – Tecmo has managed to achieve some wonderfully dramatic scenes through clever use of lighting and texture. The company has also managed to maintain a 60 frames per second refresh rate, resulting in a title that looks even more impressive on the screen than it does on the page.

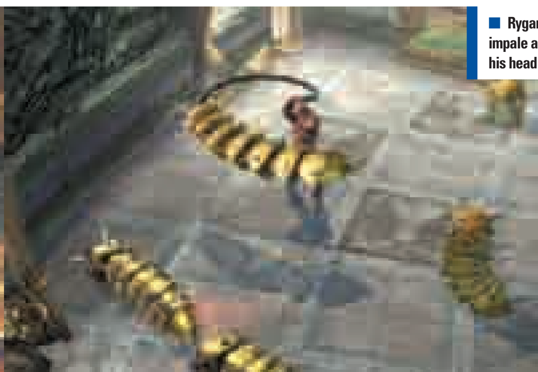
Right now, the only reservation we have is with the camera positioning in some areas. You see, for the most part it remains fixed at one point, simply following Rygar as he moves around the levels, and this usually works well enough. But on occasions the enemies are placed beyond the camera's field of vision, making them impossible to see until you're well within the reach of their weapons.

We imagine this could result in a few frustrating moments if it isn't tweaked before final release. And we hope it is sorted out because, with a little polish, *Rygar* could easily turn out to be a bit of a hit when it's released here in May.





■ You'll need something a bit stronger than aphid spray to deal with these caterpillars. A bloody great yo-yo thing should do the trick.





■ Rygar can use his Diskarmor to impale an enemy then swing it above his head to destroy other enemies.


eMag

DRIVER 3

"THE PHYSICS ENGINE ITSELF IS A HUGE DRAIN ON THE MACHINE. THERE'S SO MUCH CALCULATION INVOLVED TO ALLOW THINGS TO BE ON TOP OF EACH OTHER AND SO ON"

MARTIN EDMONDSON, DIRECTOR, REFLECTIONS

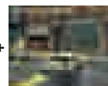
■ Xbox: Reflections has often won praise for its exaggerated car physics and crash dynamics.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

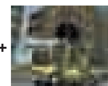
SO MANY RACING GAMES, SO MANY INFLUENCES...


DESTRUCTION DERBY

+


STUNTMAN

+


GTA

=


DRIVER 3

■ PS2: Despite being the least powerful console on the market, PS2's *Driver 3* still boasts some impressive scenery.

■ PS2: Fans of the *Driver* series will feel right at home with *Driver 3*. The game treads a lot of familiar territory.



COMPANY PROFILE

■ Reflections is a UK-based company that made a name for itself on the PSone. Next to *WipEout*, the company's banger racing title *Destruction Derby* was a big selling point for the PSone. Since then, the company has won acclaim for its driving physics and crash dynamics with *Destruction Derby 2* and, more recently, *Stuntman* on PS2.

HISTORY

■ **STUNTMAN** 2002 [PS2]
■ **DRIVER** 1999 [PSone, PC]
■ **DESTRUCTION DERBY 2** 1996 [PSone, PC]

GTA MAY BE PS2 EXCLUSIVE, BUT DRIVER 3 IS COMING TO A FORMAT NEAR YOU SOON

Anyone who owned a PSone will no doubt remember just how impressive the *Destruction Derby* games were. Although they were hardly flawless, the car dynamics and physics allowed for some impressive stunts and, perhaps more importantly, real-time car damage. The *Driver* series was created by the same developer and now, after a fairly lengthy hiatus, the series is being resurrected with *Driver 3*. Of course, technology has come on in leaps and bounds since the last *Driver* game and this increase in power, combined with the company's experience with newer projects (*Stuntman* on PS2 being the most recent), should mean that *Driver 3* turns out to be something rather special.

You'll be pleased to learn that the team creating the game has taken a lot of inspiration from *Grand Theft Auto 3* and *GTA: Vice City*. As well as being able to get out of your vehicle and walk around, you can also enter a huge number of the surrounding buildings. At this stage it's not clear how this will affect the missions, though you can expect something very close to the *GTA* games. But where this really has the edge over Rockstar's much-loved title is in its car dynamics and impressive graphics engine. Textures are crisp and colourful and clever use of lighting and real-time shadow-casting keeps everything looking fresh and vibrant.

Once again, car damage plays an important part in the grand scheme of things; doors, mirrors, bumpers, windows – you name it, it can be knocked off as you scrape against buildings, lampposts or plough through garbage and other roadside furniture. Sadly, real cars aren't included in the game as most manufacturers wouldn't allow their vehicles to be smashed up, though Reflections has done a good job of creating vehicles that bear a striking resemblance to actual makes and models.

Thirty missions are set to be included across three areas – Miami, Nice and Istanbul – and although that may not seem like a huge number compared to *Vice City*, the areas are enormous (around 30 square miles each) and many missions are broken up into smaller sub-quests. It's likely that a certain amount of hand-to-hand combat will be included – from what we hear, you can expect these sections to be closer to *GTA* than *The Getaway*. Details on the storyline are similarly vague right now, though it's likely to be something more elaborate than either of the previous *Driver* games.

This is the first *Driver* game to be released on four formats and, thankfully, Reflections is putting considerable effort into each. While many companies sit back and let shoddy PS2 conversions launch across multiple platforms, Reflections has allocated separate teams to handle GameCube, PC, PS2 and Xbox development. *Driver 3* is initially being designed for the highest-spec technology available (PC), then scaled-down accordingly to fit onto the other formats.

Although *Driver 3* won't be released until much later in the year, we're already extremely excited about it. As good as *GTA: Vice City* was, it was limited by the restrictions of PS2 and a relatively short development period. Can Reflections successfully resurrect the *Driver* series and give *Grand Theft Auto* a run for its money? Wait and see…



DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube, PC, PS2, Xbox
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Infogrames
DEVELOPER: Reflections
RELEASE: November TBC (Japan/US: TBA)
GENRE: Driving
PLAYERS: 1

■ If you're not familiar with the *Driver* series, simply think *GTA: Vice City* with more realism and impressive crash dynamics.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Three cities are included in *Driver 3* – Miami, Nice and Istanbul – and these look set to offer plenty of visual and gameplay variation. Each contains as many as 10,000 buildings, though as you'd expect only a small percentage are accessible to the player. Of course, it would be impossible to draw almost 500 miles of road accurately, let alone interact with it. Instead, Reflections has repeated some of the less important buildings and has also adjusted a few of the road layouts to make *Driver 3* as exciting as possible for the player.

"TEXTURES ARE CRISP AND COLOURFUL AND CLEVER USE OF LIGHTING KEEPS EVERYTHING LOOKING FRESH AND VIBRANT"



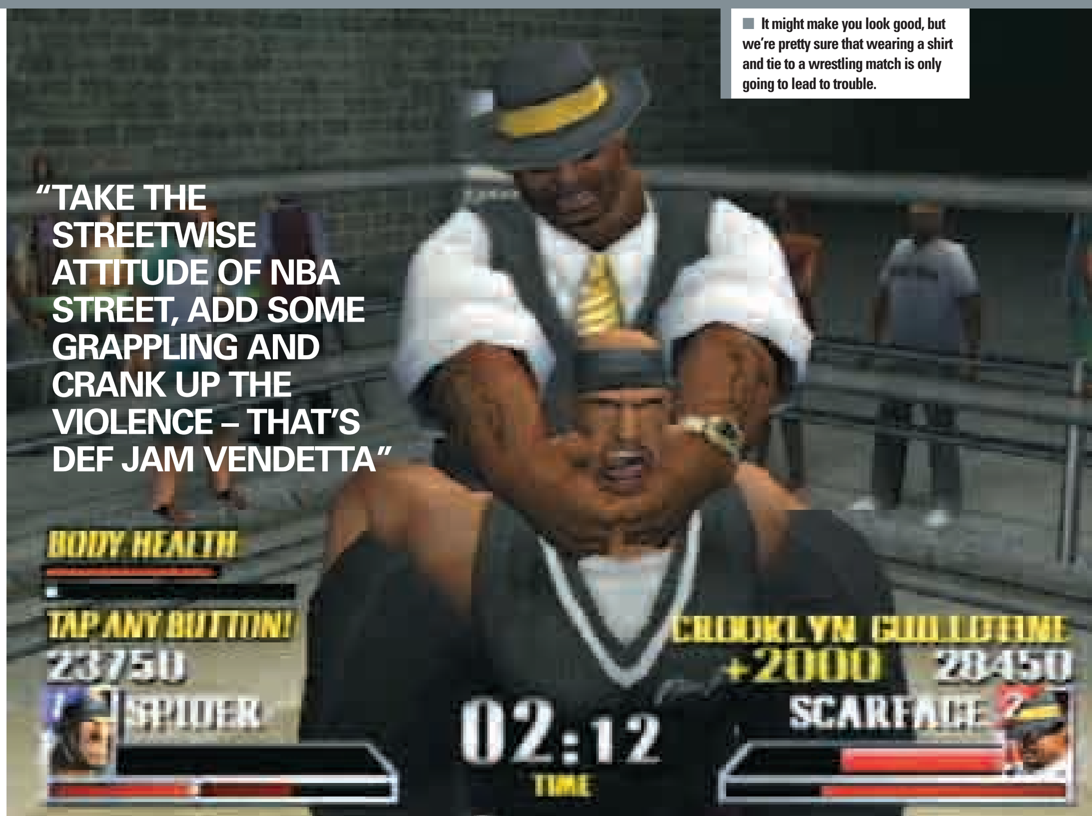
■ Xbox: Much of the scenery is interactive – backgrounds and vehicles can be damaged during high-speed chases.



■ Xbox: The streets are a little quiet in this early build. Hopefully more action will be added before the game is released.

DEF JAM VENDETTA

THUGS, GRAPPLING AND GANG VIOLENCE – IT'S ALMOST LIKE THE HOOD WHERE WE GREW UP



It might make you look good, but we're pretty sure that wearing a shirt and tie to a wrestling match is only going to lead to trouble.

"TAKE THE STREETWISE ATTITUDE OF NBA STREET, ADD SOME GRAPPLING AND CRANK UP THE VIOLENCE – THAT'S DEF JAM VENDETTA"

PS2 **Okay, stop right there, mister. Yes, we're talking to you – the one about to turn the page just because this looks like a wrestling game.** If you're the kind of person who immediately switches off at the thought of men prancing around in lycra, throwing each other around and generally 'hurting' each other, then you're most likely thinking that *Def Jam Vendetta* definitely isn't the game for you, right? Well, you shouldn't. While it might be co-developed by a company famous for its wrestling titles, feature many of the elements that make up a wrestling game and even look suspiciously like men touching each other in the name of pain, it's so much more than that. Really.

For starters, forget about the wrestling bit – seeing as the game has absolutely no affiliation with WWE, WCW or any other sports entertainment company past or present, *Def Jam Vendetta* really isn't about that. In fact, the way it's presented coupled with the plot that leads through the Story mode ignores the concept of wrestling altogether and pushes the whole 'illegal underground fighting club' angle instead.

The single-player action puts you in the boots of one of a selection of street punks who become embroiled in said fight club simply because your mate has run up some pretty big debts with the owner, a suit-wearing gangland boss by the name of D-Mob. Unless you fight and help your friend win a bit of cash, he gets his kneecaps removed – a pretty convincing reason for a scrap, if you ask us.

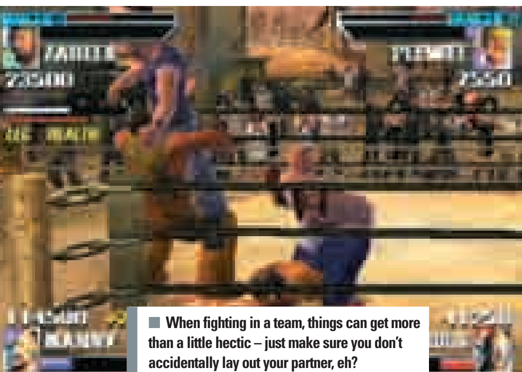
As you'd expect, *Def Jam Vendetta* features a simple-yet-effective control system – buttons for attack, grapple and run, with moves being pulled off through a combination of the three. This being a ring-based fighter though, you can perform a variety of stylish techniques by bouncing off the ropes, leaping from turnbuckles and otherwise doing your best to cripple your opponent by pounding him (or her) into the mat… but it's not wrestling. Instead, you should think of *Def Jam Vendetta* as burly gang members and hip-hop stars like Method Man and Ludacris laying into each other for money, with some impressively athletic moves thrown in for good measure; kind of like most of the conventional beat-'em-ups out there today.

Arriving on both PlayStation2 and GameCube in the next few months, it's clear that fighting fans looking for something over the usual *Street Fighter* and *Mortal Kombat* crowd should be watching out for this one.

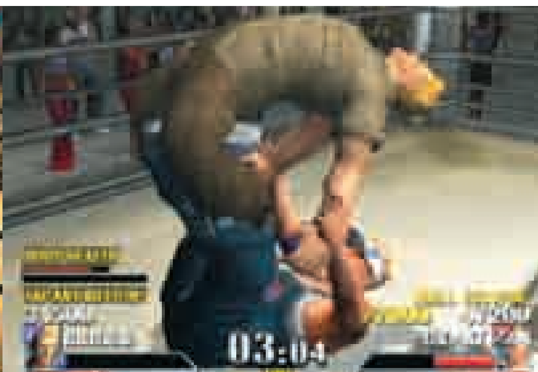
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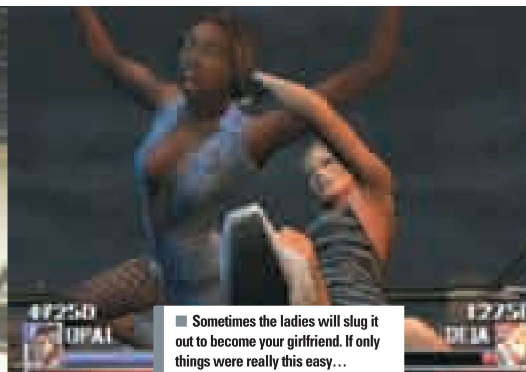
FORMAT: PS2, GC
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: EA Sports BIG
DEVELOPER: Aki Corporation/ EA Sports
RELEASE: Q2 '03 (US: Out Now)
GENRE: Wrestling
PLAYERS: 1-4

Afros, hip-hop and attitude feature in this bone-crunching street brawler.



When fighting in a team, things can get more than a little hectic – just make sure you don't accidentally lay out your partner, eh?





Sometimes the ladies will slug it out to become your girlfriend. If only things were really this easy…


eMag

DARK CHRONICLE

■ Hang on a second, you old crone – weren't you in *The Dark Crystal*?

> "DARK CHRONICLE IS FILLED WITH ELEMENTS WHICH YOU CAN USE TO CREATE YOUR OWN INVENTIONS"
> LEVEL 5'S OFFICIAL WEBSITE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

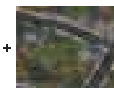
SHEDDING SOME LIGHT ON DARK CHRONICLE


DARK CLOUD

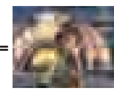
+


ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER

+


SIM CITY

=


DARK CHRONICLE

■ Well, that certainly doesn't look very friendly. Hit it a lot and maybe it'll go away.

■ Young Yuris has some rather neat mechanical skills, allowing him to construct these handy battle contraptions.



COMPANY PROFILE

■ Level 5 is a relatively new developer, but since its formation in late '98 its intention to produce RPGs that challenge leading titles has been apparent. Only the excellent *Dark Cloud* is currently available, but looking at their line-up for the near future two things are common – gorgeous visuals and involving role-playing.

HISTORY

■ **TRUE FANTASY LIVE ONLINE** [due 2003] [Xbox]
■ **DRAGON QUEST VIII** [due 2003] [PS2]
■ **DARK CLOUD** 2001 [PlayStation]

HOW DO YOU MAKE A SEQUEL SEEM SUBSTANTIALLY DIFFERENT? CEL-SHADING, OF COURSE…

Call us easily pleased, but there was something about the first *Dark Cloud* that made us smile – and not just the fat kid that hit people with a huge fish. Everything about the game combined to make an interesting and refreshingly different experience. Sure, it wasn't the best RPG we've ever played, but the Georama system (collecting items in dungeons to rebuild towns, cities and even stories) worked wonders in its favour in terms of sheer ingenuity. Character switching, random areas to explore and some great ideas in weapon evolution and character sustenance made for a generally enjoyably title that was simply begging for a sequel – a sequel that lacked all the questionable areas but expanded upon the better ones, a game that would popularise the series for a reason other than gamers' necessities. That game is *Dark Chronicle*.

Even the cynics who slated Link's new look will find it hard to criticise the new direction being taken by Level 5 with *Dark Chronicle*. While it may not be as brave a step as that taken with one of Nintendo's flagship characters, it's certainly no less beautiful and it would appear that this won't be the last time we'll be seeing its cel-shaded charms – two of Level 5's future projects (which are, unsurprisingly, RPGs) are set to use near identical techniques to make onlookers use the words 'ooh' and 'ah' a little too much. This is not without sacrifice, however; the frame rate has been cut back to 30 frames per second, but provided it remains fluid this shouldn't cause any problems. Sound will also play a major factor, and we remember that the first game had some truly beautiful melodies accompanying the action. Reproducing this quality will be all it takes to maintain these standards.

Unsurprisingly, Level 5 is playing on its strengths for this sequel by emphasising the finer points of the previous game. The town-building aspect has been played up greatly (see 'A Little To The Left…') and the character usage has been made more focused, with just two characters to alternate between. Lead male Yuris takes centre stage with his vast technical knowledge that allows him to use any relics he may find or even create his own mechanical masterpieces. Joining him is time-travelling warrior Monica; the more mystical of the two, she has great magical prowess and the ability to transform into many of the game's enemy creatures. This grants her new abilities and access to new areas, so you'll need to change characters regularly in order to fully explore every area. Providing that it does all it hopes to do, *Dark Chronicle* should serve as a strong card in Sony's hand, especially given the general weakness of its console rivals in terms of role-playing. Random dungeons are now a thing of the past, so the pre-made areas will have to be of an extremely high quality if they are to promote the kind of replay and exploration we saw in the first game. Even without having had a chance to play the game at length, we already want to put some serious time into it – the combination of the art style, the freedom and the general feel of the game all add up to an attractive package.

Strangely, just the sight of this makes us long for the forthcoming and similarly-styled *Dragon Quest VIII* and *True Fantasy Live Online*. Some day, all games will look this pretty…



DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: SCEE
DEVELOPER: Level 5
RELEASE: TBA (Japan/US: Out Now)
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

■ Sequel to one of the earliest PS2 RPGs, *Dark Chronicle* refines the great ideas of the first game and throws in some nice new graphics to boot.

A LITTLE TO THE LEFT…

Megalomaniacs no doubt fell for the town-building features of the first game – finding the Atla in dungeons would allow you to rebuild towns as you saw fit, arranging houses, shops, trees and rivers and beautifying natural surroundings. Thankfully, this wonderful feature returns for the sequel and taking a deeper approach will hopefully free up the system a little, as many thought it somewhat linear. By letting players angle items and alter terrain height, town arrangements will have infinitely more variety, and the ability to assign items and colour schemes to your buildings (as opposed to the jigsaw puzzle construction of *Dark Cloud*) takes this further still.

"WE ALREADY WANT TO SIT DOWN AND PUT SOME SERIOUS TIME INTO DARK CHRONICLE"



■ Monica is more than capable of taking care of herself.

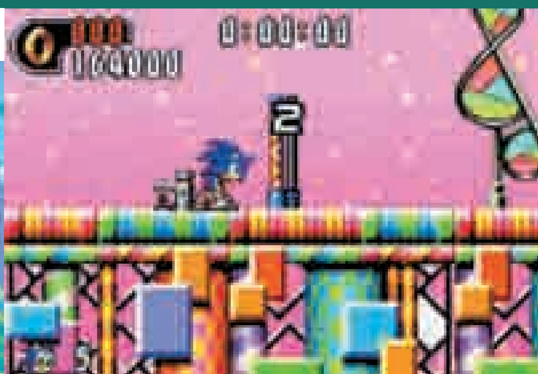


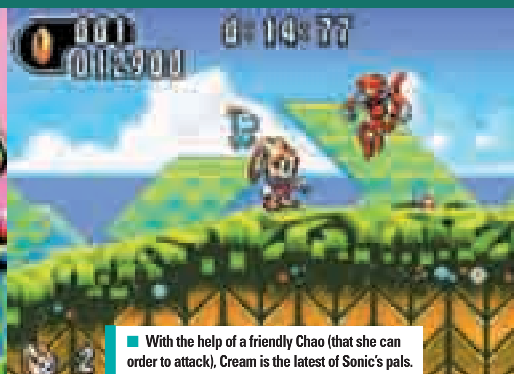
■ The town-building aspect has been greatly enhanced, allowing much more freedom for personalisation.

SONIC ADVANCE 2



Boss battles now take place on the run, making some of them trickier than ever.





With the help of a friendly Chao (that she can order to attack), Cream is the latest of Sonic's pals.

ADVANCE BY NAME, MORE OF THE SAME BY NATURE…

DETAILS

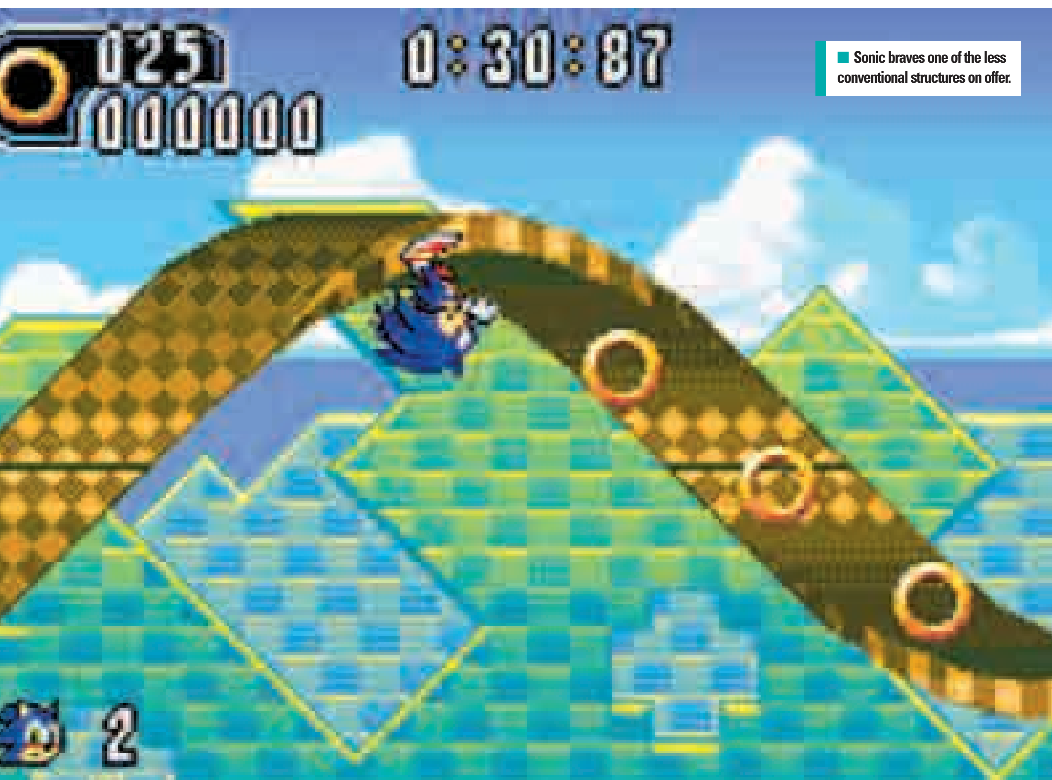
FORMAT: GBA
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Infogrames
DEVELOPER: SEGA
RELEASE: TBC (Japan: Out Now)
GENRE: Platform
PLAYERS: 1-2

The speedy blue hedgehog is back, but there's still no curtain call for Big The Cat as Sonic and friends invade Nintendo's handheld for a second time.

SEGA's mascot certainly gets about a bit. As well as appearing on every single SEGA console, he's starred in games on SNK's ill-fated Neo Geo Pocket and Nintendo's two most recent machines – and it doesn't look as though he'll be stopping any time soon. After the success of the first *Sonic Advance*, it was almost a given that it wouldn't be the blue speed-freak's last handheld outing. And sure enough, he's back with a new friend (he always seems to bring along a new face), Cream The Rabbit. And no, that isn't an instruction. Honestly…

It's doubtful whether there's anything we can say about *Sonic* that hasn't already been said but it'll come as no surprise that *Sonic Advance 2* is a speedy 2D platform game. Just four characters make this adventure – accompanying the blue one are Tails, Knuckles and newcomer Cream, a rabbit with limited flight ability and an overprotective Chao in tow. After a brief spin (no pun intended) with the Japanese version, we quickly came to the conclusion that it owes a lot to the end of the Genesis era. While there is an air of the original games about it, the moves and level design bear a greater resemblance to later titles *Sonic And Knuckles* and *Sonic CD*. This is certainly no bad thing, as these still stand out as some of the best games of their time. And by throwing in plenty of new moves and hazards as well as several from the *Sonic Adventure* games (grinding is back – good news if you're a sk8er boi), the whole experience is kept fresh.

Sonic Advance 2 certainly looks the part, moving away from its cutesy rounded origins slightly more with every title. Boss battles are a noticeable change – rather than a small area in which to fight the guardian, these end-of-level encounters take the form of pursuits. Constantly running, you'll need to be quick to keep up and even quicker to inflict any damage on the large Robotnik/Eggman-piloted monstrosities. This isn't a huge change, but combined with the rest of the little additions a new game is born from a mix of familiar ingredients topped off with a smattering of new and improved ideas. The result? A *Sonic* game that should appeal to new and casual gamers without stepping on the toes of seasoned *Sonic* fans. Classic gameplay with no mildly distracting treasure-hunting or fishing sections – just what a *Sonic* game should be. 



Sonic braves one of the less conventional structures on offer.

"ADVANCE 2 GIVES SONIC HIS MOST TRADITIONAL ADVENTURE SINCE THE 16-BIT ERA"


eMag

DANCING STAGE MEGAMIX



■ Dance! Dance! Dance like that Feet Of Flame eejit! Go on!

NOW PS2 OWNERS CAN LOOK DAFT AT HOME TOO…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: May
GENRE: Rhythm Action
PLAYERS: 1-2

■ The PS2 gets its first glimpse of boogie action as the *Dancing Stage* series shimmies onwards.

> "MORE SONGS, MORE MODES, MORE EXHAUSTION… 'MORE' IS DEFINITELY THE KEY WORD HERE"

The year is 1992. The arcades are teeming with impressionable youngsters worshipping the slightly scary man in the corner who seems almost unbeatable at *Street Fighter II*. Over a decade later, this kind of awe-inspiring gaming still exists, but chances are you won't find it near the beat-'em-up cabinets. Judging by the crowds that gather around the eight-arrowed altars of noise, dancing is the new way to set the arcades alight. As the following of the series grows exponentially, the home translations are growing more popular by the day. Each sequel tends to be little more than a new set of songs with the occasional extra play mode, and while *Megamix* looks set to continue this trend, the jump from PSone to PS2 brings with it some rather exciting new features.

Most obviously, DVD storage presents numerous new possibilities, many of which will be excellently realised. This means there'll be more songs as well as more impressive FMV backgrounds to distract you from those all-important arrows. Thankfully, the game will be fully compatible with the range of PSone pads and mats so you won't have to shell out anything extra to play.

We're not yet sure how similar *Megamix* will be to its recent import relative *DDRMAX* (from which these screenshots are taken) but it's likely that the European version will just be a localised version of *MAX*. On that note, expect a lot of the Eastern, original and Bemani tracks to be replaced with songs more suited to a European audience – tracks from Kylie Minogue, Ms Dynamite, Sugababes and The Cure, among others, have already been confirmed. We can't wait to see how the rest of the world takes to MAX300 – *MAX*'s final hurrah tears along at a whopping 300BPM (a stroke-inducing five steps a second).

Provided not too much is changed or lost from the recent Japanese and American versions of *DDRMAX*, we see no reason why this shouldn't be a huge success for Konami later in the year. Definitely one to make a song and dance about…





■ Okay, so these shots are from *DDRMAX* but it's going to be the same thing, isn't it?

■ Don't let the mines distract you – keep your eyes on the arrows and your mind on your feet. If that makes sense.


eMag

KUNG FU CHAOS





■ Being a game based on movie spoofs, you can expect plenty of pastiches of proper films; like this *Titanic*-inspired level, for instance.

ALL TOGETHER NOW: "EVERYBODY WAS KUNG-FU FIGHTING… HIII-YA"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Just Add Monsters
RELEASE: April '03 (US: Out Now)
GENRE: Beat-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1-4

■ A madcap multiplayer beat-'em-up, combining scrolling action with frantic mini-games to create something not unlike *Power Stone*. But with ninjas.

Ever found yourself sneaking around oriental mansions, lobbing shurikens at anything that moves and disappearing without trace? No, neither have we. Still, if you're looking for comical martial arts-based scrapping action without the risk of getting a samurai sword through the neck, then Microsoft might have just the thing for you – a "quirky brawling game inspired by the '70's Kung Fu movie era," according to Mr Gates's PR folk.

Basically, *Kung Fu Chaos* is what you'd get if you carried out some unholy experiment to cross-breed Capcom's Dreamcast 3D beat-'em-up *Power Stone* with the mini-game action of *Fusion Frenzy*, before tossing the DNA of a background extra from *American Ninja 3* into the test tube for good measure.

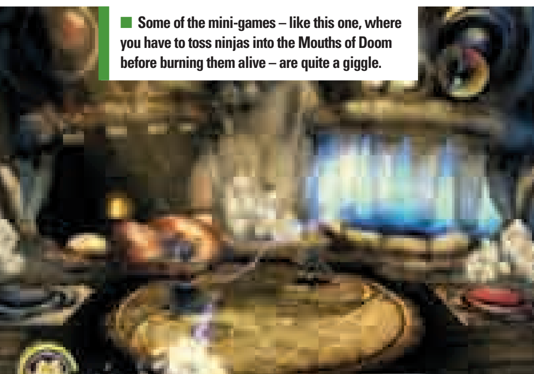
The game offers two different styles of gameplay – a scrolling 3D beat-'em-up where you'll have to negotiate obstacles, slaughter countless ninja-types and take on the obligatory end-of-stage boss, or numerous single-screen mini-games that'll test your skills and reflexes. Whether you choose to play alone or with up to three mates, the idea is the same; complete each 'scene' that the director sets up for you with enough competence to create something worthy of an Oscar.

The better you do in a level by killing enemies or completing tasks, the higher your star rating will become. If you want to progress to the following scene, you'll have to surpass the minimum star requirement – not always easy when you're being besieged by ninjas from all sides. Of course, each of these levels is supposedly being filmed for use on the big screen, so you can expect plenty of abusive comments from the director as he tries to prompt you on where to go next, as well as either praising or chastising you for your performance in his picture.

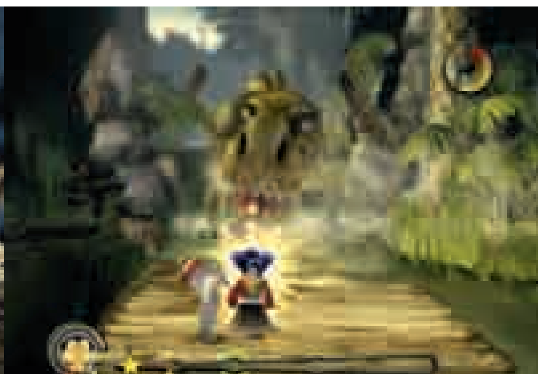
From what we've played so far, it looks as though *Kung Fu Chaos* is going to be quite a laugh to play with your mates after a night out. But with a rather limited single-player experience and no option to play through Xbox Live (which is almost a sin, given that this type of game is perfect for the service), it might not be worth everyone's attention.



"TAKE AWAY THE NINJA-BASED TOMFOOLERY AND THIS IS JUST THE BASTARD SON OF FUSION FRENZY AND POWER STONE"



■ Some of the mini-games – like this one, where you have to toss ninjas into the Mouths of Doom before burning them alive – are quite a giggle.





■ Each of the 'wacky' characters in the game has their own unique special attack, complete with slow-motion effects.


eMag

POKÉMON RUBY/SAPPHIRE

EVOLUTION RATHER THAN REVOLUTION AS PIKACHU MARCHES ON

Go on. Go ahead and laugh all you want. We know that for every Pokémaniac in the world, there are at least ten people who'll automatically dismiss anything related to the Pocket Monsters phenomenon. It's sad to think that because of a slew of gimmicky toys, confusing animations and colourful trinkets, countless people will have missed out on some of the best handheld games to date. For those that haven't dared brave a previous *Pokémon* adventure, the game follows the exploits of a fledgling trainer as they make a bid for Pokémon League glory by raising a team of powerful creatures. One of the strongest factors that holds the series together is the customisation that is possible in picking your squad of six – with so many Pokémon capable of so many attacks, the combinations are practically infinite.

It's no surprise to find that the established formula is virtually unchanged and what few alterations have been made are for the better. While a lot of the intricacies may have been overlooked due to our sketchy translation skills, two-on-two battles and active weather rank among the major updates with countless balance tweaks and sub-quests to round off the package beautifully. The larger scale battles work as well as we could have hoped; some attacks hit multiple enemies, others assist team-mates and the new Abilities often work in tandem to further emphasise the strategic elements of the game. The game is also moving more towards being tailored for the thinking man, and while it is still possible to win battles with a clutch of tough moves, the many support attacks and weather effects bring with them strategies and combos that are seldom seen outside dedicated PC puzzle and strategy games.

Even after touring most of Houen, the jury is still out on the aesthetic side of this new Pocket Monsters adventure. On one hand, everything is bright, bold and chunky and has the same feel as its predecessors, but on the other we can't help thinking that the GBA could do a lot better. Games like *Golden Sun* and *Castlevania* are testament to the visual and sonic prowess of the handheld and, while this isn't far behind, certain aspects (such as the static sprites and some slightly iffy effects) mean this doesn't feel like the leap forward that it should. In their favour, the sprites are beautifully drawn and locations and characters are as charming as in any other handheld adventure. Of course, one of the true beauties of the series is your freedom to explore – with more hard-to-find areas, sub-quests and rare monsters than ever before, this area of the game is also being brought up to date courtesy of the GBA.

Despite having played almost a hundred hours of the Japanese version of the game, a lot of areas are still shrouded in mystery. Why does the Pokédex (a record of which monsters you've seen and caught) stop at 202 when there are in-game sprites for all 386? Why is there only one landmass when *Gold*, *Silver* and *Crystal* had two huge areas to explore? We're hoping a lot of this will be made clear soon – we've just begun battling through the American version and the recently announced GameCube title (which will require either *Ruby* or *Sapphire* to play, giving weight to rumours that it will be a new *Stadium* game) may well aid the completion of our Pokédex. Either way, there's just so much to do, see and catch in Houen already that we can't complain even if we may have to wait for the token third game to actually catch 'em all.

DETAILS
FORMAT: GBA
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Game Freak
RELEASE: TBA (Japan/US: Out Now)
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1-4

That's right – gotta catch 'em all over again. Too bad we can't figure out how just yet…

NO SLEEP 'TIL 386

The big question mark hanging over *Ruby* and *Sapphire* at the moment is that of the official number of monsters available for capture. After the 151 of the first wave of games and the extra hundred added by the sequels, common sense got the better of many Pokéfans who immediately assumed that the first GBA *Pokémon* adventure would have 351. A logical assumption, sure, but since we've had no official creature count from Nintendo, we can only go from experience. Legendaries fall at the end of the all-new Pokédex (number 200 being the highest we've reached), which would suggest that this is where the catalogue ends. Cheaters around the world have managed to unleash the remaining monsters but there seems to be no way of legitimately finding them or registering which you've come across – a necessary upgrade, item or area obviously hasn't been found yet. If it even exists, that is…

> "THE GAME IS MOVING MORE TOWARDS BEING TAILORED FOR THE THINKING MAN"



There'll be plenty of new locations to visit, all of them teeming with Pokémon. Perhaps…



COMPANY PROFILE

■ Game Freak was founded way back in 1989 when Pikachu was still but a twinkle in his creator's eye. Developing several smaller titles for Nintendo consoles since then, it only achieved any real recognition after catching small creatures became a worldwide phenomenon.

HISTORY

- **POKÉMON RED/BLUE** 1999 [Game Boy]
- **YOSHI'S COOKIE** 1993 [SNES]
- **MENDEL PALACE** 1990 [NES]



■ This map shows all of Houen, but is there still more to uncover? Our guess is that there probably is...

■ Filling the new Pokédex is now harder than ever before.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

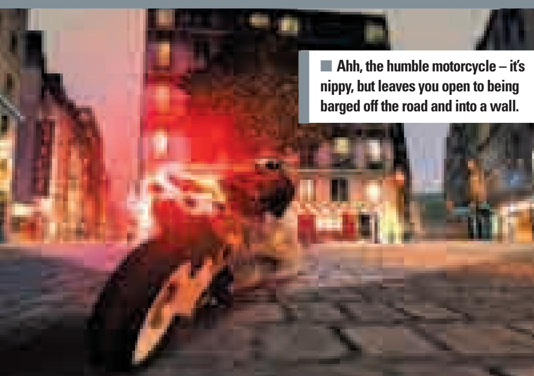
POKÉMON EVOLUTION RESEARCHED

POKÉMON R/B/Y/G/S/C + MORE MONSTERS - CARTOON SERIES = POKÉMON RUBY/SAPPHIRE

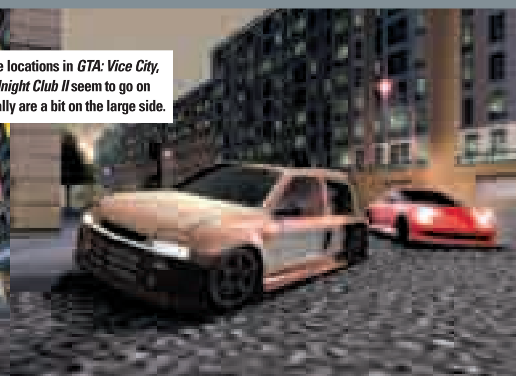
■ Groudon, the legendary monster from the *Ruby* version of the game, is as tough a creature as you'll find.

> **"POKÉMON RUBY AND POKÉMON SAPPHIRE ARE TWO OF THE MOST ANTICIPATED POKÉMON GAMES EVER DEVELOPED"**
> *POKÉMON PRESS RELEASE*

MIDNIGHT CLUB II


Ahh, the humble motorcycle – it's nippy, but leaves you open to being barged off the road and into a wall.




Much like the locations in *GTA: Vice City*, the cities in *Midnight Club II* seem to go on forever. They really are a bit on the large side.

GENTLEMAN, START YOUR ILLEGAL STREET RACING ENGINES…

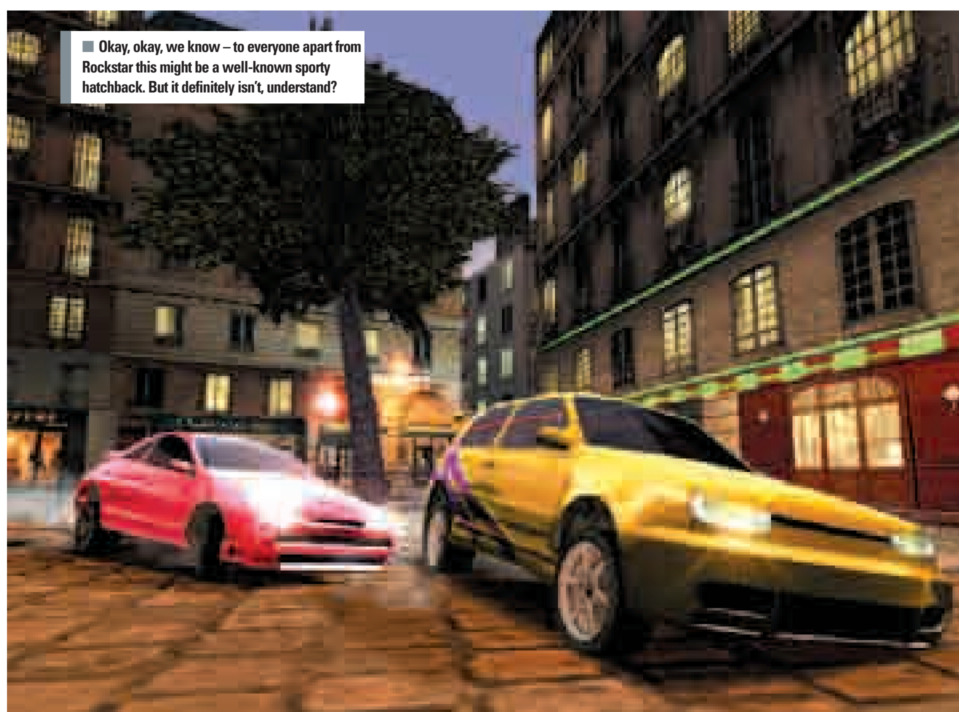
DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2/ Xbox/PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Rockstar Games
DEVELOPER: Rockstar San Diego
RELEASE: April '03
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-2

It's street racing with a *GTA* edge – skid through cities, race down alleys and even cheat in an effort to reach the finish line first.

PS2 **Despite the air of illicit thrill-seeking they try to generate, games based on illegal street racing generally aren't all that exciting – in fact, aside from examples like Acclaim's *Burnout* series and possibly SEGA's upcoming mountain racer, *Initial D*, they've all been pretty much of a muchness.** Of course, that's not going to stop people having a crack at trying to break the cycle – especially if you're on a bit of a roll, as Rockstar Games seems to be at the moment. Developed by the newly renamed Rockstar San Diego (formerly Angel Studios, the people behind Capcom's upcoming western shoot-'em-up *Red Dead Revolver*), *Midnight Club II* seeks to bring the thrill factor back to a genre that has, in recent times, managed to lose the edge that any game featuring illegal activities should probably have.

"THE ABILITY TO TAKE NUMEROUS SHORT CUTS AND LEAP OVER RAMPS TO GET AHEAD REALLY HELPS BRING BACK THE EDGE THIS KIND OF GAME NEEDS"


Okay, okay, we know – to everyone apart from Rockstar this might be a well-known sporty hatchback. But it definitely isn't, understand?

In order to do this and succeed where other games have failed, it's rather obvious that Rockstar has been influenced just a little by the combined might of *Grand Theft Auto 3* and *GTA: Vice City* when trying to come up with ideas and designs for *MCII*. Sadly, you can't pull your opponent through the windscreen of his car and bludgeon him to a bloody pulp if he beats you, but it's more in the area of map and vehicle design rather than violence that *MCII* imitates *GTA*.

Rather than having restrictive circuits, the tracks in *MCII* are set across sprawling cityscapes with checkpoint markers indicating which way you should be heading. Of course, with all manner of ramps, alleyways and other rather sneaky short cuts on offer (as is the case in the backstreet-riddled cities of the *GTA* games) that doesn't necessarily mean you have to take the route that's laid out. Indeed, with this being illegal street racing, cheating is pretty much encouraged in the race to bag first place and all the kudos that comes with it. The vehicles also manage to glean inspiration from *GTA* – not only do the cars bear more than a small resemblance to actual vehicles (despite being unlicensed and, therefore, posing under fake names), but if you're feeling particularly daring you can even choose to ride on a motorbike and sacrifice safety for even more speed.

Having sat down with a near-complete version of the game, we have to admit that we're surprised at how good *Midnight Club II* is turning out – mainly because we thought the first one was fun but ultimately uninspired. As long as nothing goes wrong between now and when the game finally comes out, this could easily help to continue Rockstar's streak of good fortune.


eMag

SHOWCASE

THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

VIRTUA FIGHTER 4: EVOLUTION

PUNCH, KICK – IT'S ALL IN THE MIND

Format: PlayStation2/Arcade
Origin: Japan
Publisher: SEGA
Developer: AM2
Release: Q2 '03 (Arcade: Out Now)
Genre: Beat-'em-up
Players: 1-2



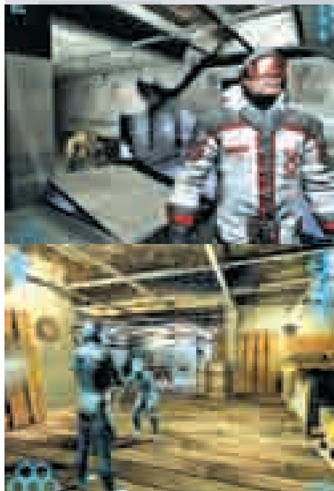
Although the *Virtua Fighter* series has changed a great deal since its inception in 1993, it looks as though SEGA is following in the footsteps of Capcom for its latest beat-'em-up release. The name pretty much speaks for itself; rather than being a totally new game, *Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution* is simply an improvement over the previous outing. Not only have several 'tweaks' been made to the game mechanics, but now two entirely new characters have been added as well; Gou Hinogami, a paid assassin, and a kickboxer with the suitably beat-'em-up-style name Brad Burns. Will they be enough to make people buy the game all over again? We're not so sure…

DEUS EX 2: INVISIBLE WAR

IT'S A LITTLE BIT OF EVERYTHING…

Format: PlayStation2/Xbox/PC
Origin: US
Publisher: Eidos Interactive
Developer: Ion Storm
Release: Q3 '03
Genre: Action RPG
Players: TBA

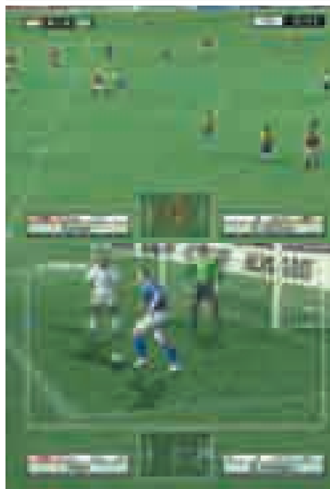
There can be no denying that *Deus Ex* is one of the most involved shooters we've ever seen. Unsurprisingly, the multiformat sequel due later this year is being augmented in all the right places to surpass its predecessor in every aspect. Offering a true non-linear story, *Deus Ex 2* will offer the player the opportunity to tackle situations as he or she wishes; stealth, evasion and a heavy-handed approach will all be options, depending on how you develop your character. If all the claims of improved gameplay, depth and AI prove well-founded, we should be in for a nano-tech enhanced treat in several months time. Watch this space…



INTERNATIONAL SUPERSTAR SOCCER 3

JUMPERS FOR GOALPOSTS AND ALL THAT

Format: PlayStation2/GameCube
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House
Release: March '03
Genre: Sports
Players: 1-4



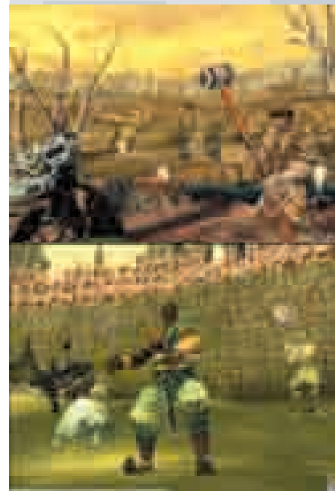
For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction – yin has its yang, fish have their chips and, of course, *Pro Evolution Soccer* has its *International Superstar Soccer*. Presenting itself as a more arcade-style version of Konami's best-selling football title, *ISS* is still the game of choice for less anal soccer fans the world over; and the third instalment of it is due out on the PlayStation2 and GameCube any time… now. Enhancements over the previous release are numerous but, unfortunately, review code for *ISS3* wasn't available before we went to press. Nevertheless, we'll certainly be able to give you a complete opinion on this possible *FIFA*-beater next month.

GLADIUS

'CONTENDERS, READY! GLADIATORS, READY!'

Format: PS2/Xbox/GameCube
Origin: US
Publisher: Activision
Developer LucasArts
Release: Q2 '03
Genre: Strategy
Players: 1-2

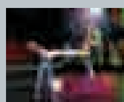
It seems like it's been in development for absolutely ages – quite appropriate, really, considering LucasArts's gladiatorial extravaganza is set long, long ago. Focusing heavily on a mixture of real-time and turn-based action, *Gladius* puts you in charge of a gladiator school and gives you the opportunity to recruit and train a team of warriors before sending them into battle for the entertainment of the crowd. While it sounds like there's loads to do (16 different warrior classes, over a thousand unique skills and the chance to customise your team), we're not entirely convinced that this is going to be much cop. We'll have to wait and see…





CANNED – NBA/NFL/NHL2K3 (GC)

■ Anyone hoping to get their hands on a SEGA Sports title for the GameCube anytime soon should probably give up – SEGA's cancelled all of them because they just don't do well enough on the console. Typical.



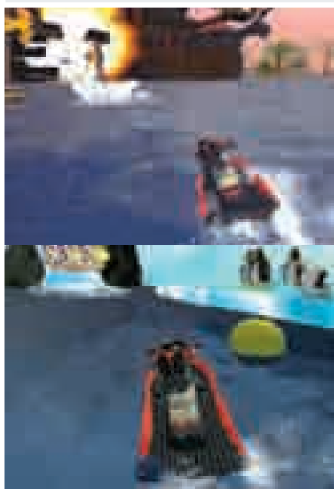
CANNED – KAKUTO CHOJIN (XBOX)

■ Citing religious reasons behind the cancellation, Microsoft has decided to never release *Kakuto Chojin* in the UK – plus they've pulled it from the rest of the world. But we think it was because it was crap.

SPLASHDOWN 2

TIME TO LAY THE SPLASHDOWN

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: US
Publisher: THQ
Developer: Rainbow Studios
Release: June '03
Genre: Action Adventure
Players: 1-2



Surprise surprise, the sequel machine is at it again. Take one game that's done reasonably well in the past (in this case, jet-ski racing game *Splashdown*), throw in a whole bunch of new innovations and some prettier graphics and boom – one ready-made sequel. In truth though, it looks as though Rainbow Studios has done a fair bit more than just rehash the original game in order to come up with *Splashdown 2*. With some even nicer water effects, twice as many stunts as before and a totally new set of Career modes to play through, this might just be the game that knocks *WaveRace: Blue Storm* off the top of the watersports podium.

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP SNOOKER 2003

POT THE RED, THEN SCREW BACK…

Format: PlayStation2/Xbox/PC
Origin: UK
Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: In-House
Release: Q2 '03
Genre: Sports
Players: 1-2

Blimey – and we remember the days when we thought watching a floating cue knock balls around *Archer McLean*'s green baize was fancy. But the 'exciting' world of snooker has come a long way since then; otherwise, we wouldn't be able to look forward to *World Championship Snooker* from Codemasters. Featuring 28 real-life players, realistic venues (including Sheffield's Crucible Theatre) and all the tournaments you'd expect from an officially licensed game, there's also the chance to play either 8-ball or 9-ball pool, show off in Trickshot mode or have Dennis Taylor teach you the basics in Coaching mode. Could you ask for anything more? Probably not.



STARCRAFT: GHOST

SOMETHIN' STRANGE IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD?

Format: PS2/Xbox/GameCube/PC
Origin: US
Publisher: Vivendi Universal
Developer: Blizzard
Release: TBA
Genre: Action Adventure
Players: 1



Based on the best-selling real-time strategy game that dominated charts a few years ago, *Starcraft: Ghost* follows the storylines of the *Starcraft* universe pretty faithfully, setting itself several years after the *Brood War*, the add-on pack to the original *Starcraft* game. However, in trying to appeal to a wider audience, the game has left its RTS roots and plunged into a mixture of almost every third-person adventure game you've ever seen. Featuring everything from *Metal Gear Solid*-style stealth missions and *Tomb Raider*-esque action to mass battles, it looks as though *Starcraft: Ghost* might be quite interesting – but we doubt fans of the PC original will be too happy about it.

AIRPORT TYCOON 2

IS IT A BIRD? IS IT A PLANE? ACTUALLY, IT IS A PLANE…

Format: PC
Origin: US
Publisher: Take 2 Interactive
Developer: In-House
Release: Q2 '03
Genre: Simulation
Players: 1

Like planes, do you? Of course you do – after all, who doesn't like sitting outside the airport, watching them disappear into the clouds (besides, er, most people)? That's why some of you might be chuffed to hear that Take 2 is set to release *Airport Tycoon 2*, the latest in its line of 'people building up industrial empire' games. As you would expect, the game focuses heavily on creating the perfect airport with reliable airlines, tight security and the best services around – but you'll also have to deal with ball-breaking contractors, natural disasters and even terrorist attacks. So, topical and not at all irresponsible then; just what the current political climate ordered.





He goes for the dunk… he's on fire **NBA Jam Tournament Edition SNES [Acclaim] 1994**



PIPPEN
ARMSTRONG
TURBO
1

Too often dismissed as unimportant and childish, games have actually been covertly changing the world around us. games™ looks at how videogames are getting their teeth stuck into the wider world...

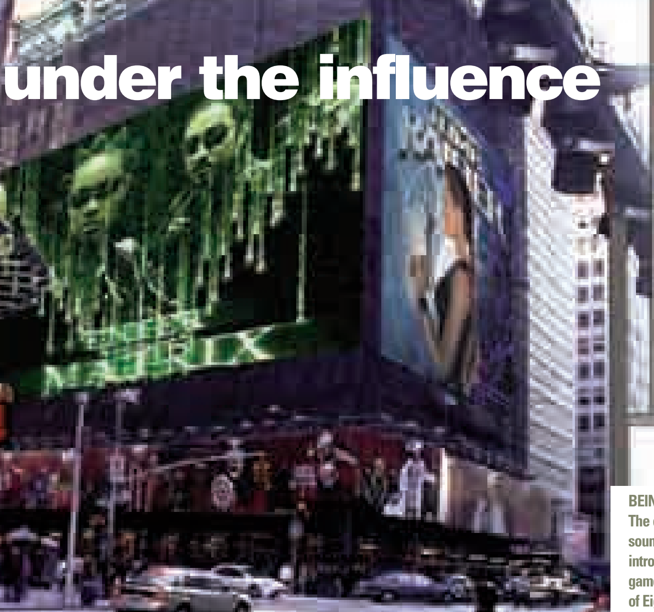
The games industry imploded under the weight of the useless games with which it had choked players back in 1983, causing many observers to say that games were merely a fad. Videogames, they argued, were a passing fashion, just another pony on the endless merry-go-round of children's fickle interests. How wrong they were.

Fast forward to the present and games are bigger than ever. Yet while they are increasingly accepted as part of everyday life, their influence on the wider world is often overlooked. From the films we watch to the sports we play, videogames have spent the past 20 years making their presence felt well beyond the confines of a TV or computer monitor.

The most obvious place where the impact of videogames can be felt is in the movie industry. Since the arrival of Disney's *Tron* in 1982, the film and game industries have been feeding off each other's ▷

under the


SONY
SONY THEATRES



BEING THERE: The eight *GTA:VC* soundtracks have introduced today's gamers to the joy of Eighties music.





Final Fantasy demonstrates that the boundaries between cinema and games are collapsing

ideas. The most obvious examples of this symbiosis can be found in games like *Metal Gear Solid* and the succession of movies based on videogames such as *Pokémon*, *Tomb Raider* and *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*.

However, the links go deeper than that and Hollywood is increasingly recreating the look and feel of videogames in films like *The Matrix* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. These and many other action films exaggerate reality (particularly in fighting scenes) in the same way that videogames offer players an over-the-top version of the real world. While unrealistic events have always been present in action movies, the influence of games on how that unrealism is presented is growing fast.

Videogame academic Matteo Bittanti believes that this influence is set to grow: "Videogames are not only becoming the subject of many films but, perhaps more interestingly, they are increasingly influencing contemporary cinema," he says. "See, for instance, the frantic pace and the multi-directional plotting of *Run Lola Run* or the ongoing fascination with the slippery border between reality and digital illusions in such films as *The Matrix*. But also think about Spike Jonze's use of the role-playing metaphor in *Being John Malkovich* or the puzzle-solving structure of *Memento*.

"Also, more and more films are depicting the game player as a new pop cultural icon, think about French comedy *Gamer*," he continues. "Aesthetically, films like *Final Fantasy* demonstrate that the boundaries between cinema and games are collapsing. And this is just the beginning."

The rise of DVD has strengthened the bond between games and films, and the extra features of DVD movies have opened the doors for game-like interactivity. "DVD allows the user to control the presentation of audio and visual sequences and has refined the act of watching a movie, transforming it from a passive experience to an interactive one," argues Bittanti. However, gaming's influence on that other bastion of pop culture, music, has been markedly less impressive. Aside from records like *Pac-Man Fever* (a US top ten hit, no less) and Kernkraft 400's *Zombie Nation* (which was based on the music to Commodore 64 game *Lazy Jones*) the impact of games on music has been near invisible.

Game soundtrack albums, however, are starting to appear more regularly, with the likes of *Jet Set Radio Future*, *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* and *Smuggler's Run* all spawning music CDs. It is certainly an area that game publishers are looking at closely as the recent formation of the game soundtrack record label Couch Sounds demonstrates.

Sergio Pimental, creative director at Couch Sounds (whose first release will be the soundtrack to Infogrames's *Furious Karting*), believes that game soundtracks haven't been successful because people haven't been exposed to them in the right way.

"The soundtrack albums to *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* were definitely a step in the right direction," Pimental says, "but putting it across seven CDs was probably a bit much. You have to wonder whether the gamers of today would be





into what is really a branded Eighties music collection." In the longer term, Pimental believes game soundtracks could become a strong platform for music labels to launch new artists.

"This is already happening," he claims, "and I have heard that one band who were on the verge of being dropped by their record label had their fortunes turned around by having a song on a hit game.

"We are not that far away from games becoming a useful tool for record labels in reaching a bigger audience. Also, having a song on a game soundtrack can also help unsigned bands get taken seriously by record labels."

Whether game music would scale the heights it has in Japan (where songs from games like *Pikmin* become hits) remains to be seen, but the experience of the extreme sports world suggests that games really do have the potential to create stars. The most obvious example is skateboarding legend Tony Hawk who, at least in Europe, is probably more famous for the games he puts his name to than his skateboarding skills. The man himself though thinks this might not be the case just on this side of the Atlantic.

"The games have been very important in making me famous outside of the gaming scene," Hawk says. "In fact, some people that have the game thought I was only a character, rather than a real person."

The popularity of extreme sports games (in particular, Activision's *O2* games) is also boosting the appeal of the sports themselves, which in turn means that professionals like Tony Hawk have become household names.

"People seem to recognise my name more than they recognise my face because of the game," he says, "but then skateboarding has come a long way recently, so who knows? I'd like to think I made it this far because of my skating skills and not just from the videogames. The games have helped skating get recognised by a much bigger audience, but my passion is still to just get out there and ride, otherwise I wouldn't feel justified having all this success."

Most games do play up old stereotypes about samurai, cars or technology...

As well as sparking interest in extreme sports, games have also helped generate an interest in Japan and blazed the trail for other strands of Japanese culture to reach the West.

Prior to the rise of Japan as the world leaders in videogame industry, only a smattering of Japanese culture managed to cross over to the West – *Godzilla* and *Battle Of The Planets* (which was based on a Japanese cartoon) being the most high-profile examples. However, as Japanese games become more and more popular a wider interest in Japan has emerged.

Dr Christopher Hood, director of Cardiff Business School's Japanese Studies Centre, agrees that games may have helped to open the door for other aspects of Japanese life to make their presence felt in the West.

"Although the games people play don't always reflect life in Japan – since many use non-country specific fantasy worlds – games have potentially helped bring Japanese culture to the west," says Hood.

"Games that are related to Japan tend to ▷





PICTURE THIS: *Crouching Tiger…* and *Being John Malkovich* have been influenced by games.

Army Moves

Games have also got their claws into the military and for years generals the world over have been experimenting (usually with limited success) with turning games into a good way of teaching people to kill. Hit games like *Half-Life*, *Creatures* and *Battlezone* have tried out life in the military, and flight simulations from the likes of Digital Image Design and Digital Integration have proved useful in the RAF. And, as if to top it off, the US Army is now trying to entice new recruits with *America's Army*, a free PC game an



Stars In Their Eyes

Games have managed to propel more than just their developers to stardom. We look at the people and products that games have made famous.

• Captain Planet



This eco-friendly cartoon series had a UK profile on a par with, er, something insignificant until Mindscape teamed up with Tony Crowther to create an iffy platformer that gave the sharing, caring cartoon a (very) brief taste of fame.

• Elvira



Part buxom goth, part TV presenter Elvira failed to make a mark outside the US until one game publisher hit on the idea of releasing a series of games based on her vamping antics. Soon afterwards, her show hit the UK in the form of a late night slot on Channel 4. Can't win them all, then.

• Mötley Crüe



Who would have thought that in 2003 millions of people would be listening to the rock-tastic sound of hairspray metallers Mötley Crüe? Surely proof that *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* is the insult to taste and decency that knee-jerk politicians believe it is.

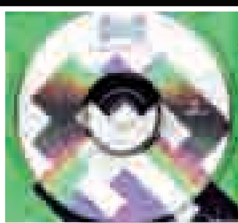
• Tony Hawk, Mat Hoffman & Kelly Slater



Big names in skateboarding, BMX and surfing these guys may be, but until their games arrived knowledge of their extreme skills was little known outside of their respective sporting circles. Of course, that's all changed now and Hawk in particular has risen to the edge of mainstream stardom.








ELECTRONICA: Tracks based on music from games have achieved varying degrees of chart success.

focus on very specific parts of modern Japan or elements of Japanese history such as samurai, and amongst my students some have developed an interest in Japan from playing such games."

Games have certainly helped bring manga and animé over to the west and historically accurate games like *Kessen* have introduced many to Japan's history.

However, notes Hood, Japanese music has failed miserably to make the leap: "It is surprising that there has been no musical invasion by Japanese musicians, given the popularity of games you would have expected at least one or two songs to enter the charts," he says.

Although games have managed to bring a slice of Japanese life to the West, the tendency of the game industry to home in on the more bizarre aspects of Japanese gaming culture like cosplay – where people dress up as their favourite videogame characters – doesn't provide a true picture of Japan.

"Most games do play up to old stereotypes about samurai, cars or technology," says Hood, "but in reality Japan is not like it seems in these games or on *Tarrant On TV*. The Japanese are just like us and in fact they are much more like us than Americans are. For whatever reason, we tend to pick up on the odd bits of Japanese culture and they do likewise with us picking out things like *The Royle Family* and *Mr Bean* which are hardly indicative of everyday Britain."

However, while the accuracy of the view of Japan we get from games is questionable, there is no doubt that it has certainly improved our knowledge of the country and, if current government plans come to anything, games may be improving our understanding in other areas too.

At present, the Department for Education and Skills is pumping millions into setting up hi-tech classrooms in a bid to revolutionise schooling, and one area in which these space age classrooms could really make a difference is in making games part of the regular curriculum.

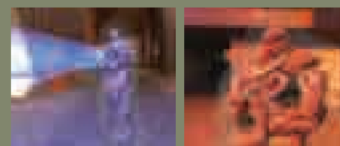
In fact, a government-approved agency called Teachers Evaluating Educational Multimedia (TEEM) has advocated the use of games like *Age Of Empires* and *Sim City* as teaching aids in schools and has gone so far as to drawn up a framework so that teachers can identify which games may be of use.

Computerised training consultancy Fastrak Consulting believes that there's a huge potential for using games in schools. "Games have a big role to play in education," notes Clive Shepherd, Fastrak's managing director. "Games can cover an awful amount of what kids have to learn and are very good at enabling children to explore various concepts."

So it seems that the extent to which games have changed the world so far is little more than the warm-up before they really make their mark.

Machinima

As well as transforming movie making, games have also spawned the underground machinima form of film. Machinima film makers use videogames to create a film by acting out the plot by playing the game. The number of machinima films is growing rapidly thanks to the low cost involved, and everything from comedies and dramas to action flicks have been created using the approach. In fact, the movement has now reached the stage where there is a machinima film festival. "The implications of this technology should not be underestimated," reckons videogame academic Matteo Bittanti. "Machinima transforms videogame users into film directors and allows them to make a low-cost feature-length film. The virtual nature of machinima means film makers can set their films anywhere they like, featuring anything or anyone they like, without limits on their storyline." You can visit www.machinima.com to find out more.





"The games have been very important in making me famous outside of the gaming scene. In fact, some people thought I was only a character, rather than a real person."
Skateboarding legend Tony Hawk



Dante's back, and this time it's personal… we think. Unfortunately, Devil May Cry 2's slightly muddled storyline and simplified gameplay make for a rather lacklustre experience

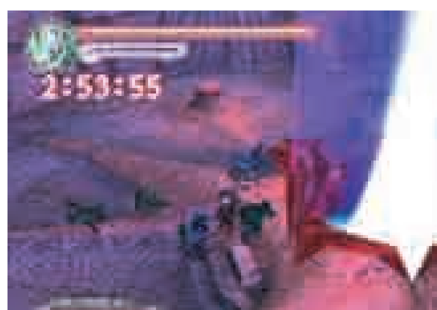
THE AVERAGE

Despite representing an industry in which high scores mean everything, **games**™ is not a magazine that marks with the majority. A lot of people think that anything below 7 (7.0, 70%, whatever) is a bad score – we don't. Going on a scale of one to ten, five is the average – average being a game that does what it sets out to do without attempting to do it better than anyone else. If a game gets five, you'll get some enjoyment out of it but nothing more, simple as that. What's more, we won't be swayed by PR people telling us what a game's like – we only decide once we've played each game to death and, in the majority of cases, to completion. If a game's bad, we'll make sure you know; if it's great, we'll sing its praises. At the end of the day, we're just here to help you decide what's worth your hard-earned cash. After all, if it wasn't for you, we'd be out of a job.

REVIEWS



■ We like the big bosses in *Devil May Cry 2* – if only because it's so much more satisfying to kick the arse of a big guy for once.



■ Loads of enemies and a time limit; think you can work out what to do next? Hey, it's not exactly rocket science here…



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW? NOT IN THIS INSTANCE, UNFORTUNATELY…

DEVIL MAY CRY 2

When a development company creates a game that sells by the bucketload and is generally loved by everyone who plays it, the process of coming up with a sequel must be an absolute nightmare. Not only do you have to produce something that's more impressive, but you also need to include enough new elements to create more than just a rehash of the original. Unfortunately, we've seen sequels fail on either one or both counts so many times that it's difficult not to be wary when yet another game with the 'follow-up to the hugely successful original' moniker pops up; even when it's from a company with such a prestigious reputation as Capcom.

Those of you who haven't had a chance to delve into the first *Devil May Cry* will want to know why it was, and still is, considered so special. Despite coming from the *Resident Evil* school of thought, Dante's first adventure was everything that some people thought the survival horror series needed in order to take the next step – a faster pace with heaps more action, a darker plot with some serious gothic undertones and, most importantly, a completely revamped control system. The result? A sword-slashing, gun-blazing, demon-slaying action adventure that was, frankly, too cool for school. In fact, with so many simple-yet-effective ideas to choose from, you would have thought that it would be pretty tough to make a sequel that wasn't at least as good as the original, yes? Well, so did we; but then, that's probably why the finished experience left us slightly stunned. In fact, it almost beggars belief how two games that sound and look so similar can actually feel so different to play. All the makings of a classic sequel are here; demon-slayer Dante, complete with big swords and even bigger guns? Check. Lush levels and areas, resplendent in their gothic undertones? Check. Legions of 'to-the-slaughter' demonic nasties and bosses, ready for you to slice and dice? Check and double check. So if that's the case, the question is: how on earth has *Devil May Cry 2* wound up being so shallow and repetitive?

In truth, there are several reasons, although at a casual glance they're not totally apparent. Of



Even though you'll be surrounded by enemies on a regular basis, it's never difficult to fight your way through them.

FAQs

Q. LOTS OF MISSIONS?
Dante's quest might be shorter in terms of missions (18 against the original's 23), but the addition of an extra character kind of makes up for the loss.

Q. GOOD PLOT?
It's got something to do with an evil businessman and the Demon King trying to take over the world, but most of it made no sense to us.

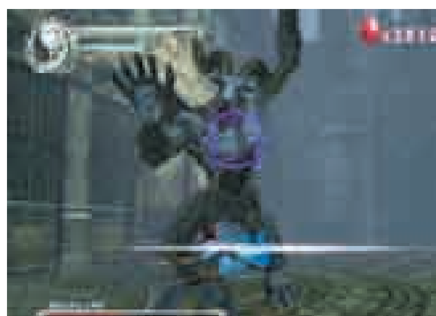
Q. ANYTHING TO UNLOCK?
Quite a bit, by the looks of it – additional costumes and difficulty levels for each character, a special area for amassing Red Orbs and even the return of a familiar face from the first game.



You can see the game from a whole new perspective if you play as the new character Lucia. Ideal for exploring your feminine side (and killing things).

BLACK MAGIC WOMAN

One of the few improvements in *Devil May Cry 2* that is actually a good idea is the introduction of a second playable character – a female demon-slayer by the name of Lucia. Getting an entire disc to herself for her half of the adventure, Lucia experiences the events of the game in a slightly different way to Dante by visiting areas and fighting bosses in an alternative order (similar to the Claire/Leon split in *Resident Evil 2*). On top of that, she also uses a different set of weapons to Dante, favouring knives and throwing weapons over explosives and handguns, and even turns into an angel-like being when running around in Devil Trigger mode. Of course, she's not the only playable lady in the game… but then, those of you who played the first game could have probably already guessed that.

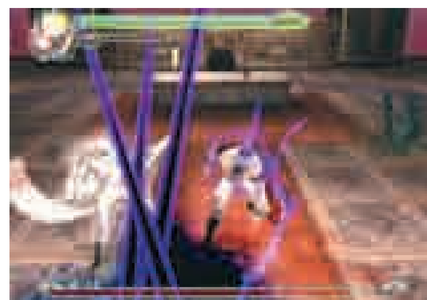




course, this might be mainly because the graphics are pretty much faultless in terms of quality and detail. With the original game being presented with such precision and clarity (from every detail of Dante's flowing coat and facial features to the sheer beauty of his surroundings), it would have been a big mistake for Capcom to take a backwards step with the visuals; thankfully, it hasn't. Covering a wider range of locations than before – such as a rustic village, a towering skyscraper, an oil rig and, of course, the demon underworld – there's certainly plenty of variety in the look of the game from level to level, so you'll never find yourself getting bored of the same old backgrounds over and over again.

Unfortunately, the pleasing visuals grafted from the first game aren't nearly enough to hide the sequel's shortcomings once you actually start playing. For starters, the story (which was one of the highlights of the original, with bad boy Dante delivering plenty of sharp-tongued comments along the way) is lacking in all the wrong places. New characters suddenly appear for no good reason, plot threads are introduced as though you should already know what's going on – even when you don't – and as for Dante… well, he hardly says anything at all rather than being a smart-mouthed son-of-a-demon. Admittedly, some of you might feel that a well thought-out plot isn't necessary in an action adventure game like this, but it's something the previous game had a pretty good go at all the same. Part of the appeal of *Devil May Cry* was that Dante put himself across as the Solid Snake of the demon world; he played it cool, acted like a bad-ass and basically ended up being a character that gamers thought was pretty damn great. In going for the 'strong and silent' type this time around though, he just ends up looking a bit crap. Tie this to the fact that Dante's counterpart, Lucia, has virtually no charm or charisma, the bad guy isn't at all threatening and the story doesn't even make sense half the time and you've got one mess of a plot – not surprisingly, there's no sense of being involved with what's going on and the pace of the game suffers because of it.

In the same vein as the story feeling like an afterthought, the major boss fights also seem rather tacked on. Once integral to the plot progression, each boss used to give Dante plenty of lip and therefore a reason to be slaughtered. Now, they just pop up at the end (or even the beginning) of a mission for absolutely no reason and go 'I'm a giant demon blocking your path – kill me'. What's more, they're not even that difficult to destroy and can generally be beaten by finding a



Meet the evil businessman trying to raise the Demon King – he's a bit of a git. Unsurprisingly, he pops up more than a few times in the story.

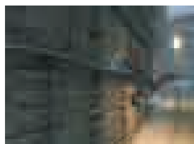


The camera often makes the game look great but on the odd occasion it does lead to you fighting against enemies you can't even see.

24:00 TIMELINE HI-LIGHTS

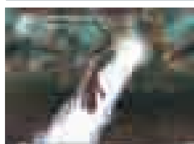
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO REACH THEM

00:10 MINUTES



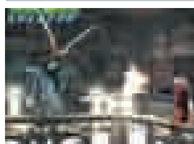
The opening minutes of the game are the teaser – you'll be playing with Dante's new moves and generally finding out that everything looks just as lovely as it did before.

06:00 HOURS



Despite being the longer of the two, six hours is more than enough time to plug through the whole of Dante's adventure and discover that the story really doesn't make any sense.

2 DAYS



By now, you'll have completed both characters in Normal and Dante/Lucia Must Die modes – more than enough to send you back to the original game, just for old time's sake.

ENHANCED

games™

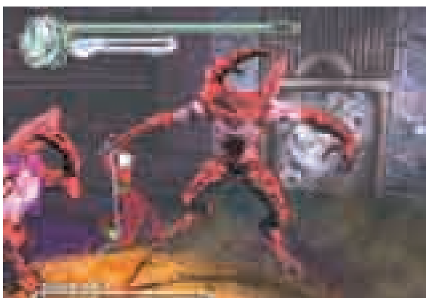
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

NEW FACES: By playing as new girl Lucia, you'll get to see the story from two different angles.

MOVE IT: Both characters have a wide range of new moves for pulling off acrobatic stunts and tricks.



Some of the weapons – like the Machine Guns – look nice but don't feel like they've got the weight that hitting someone with a big sword offers.

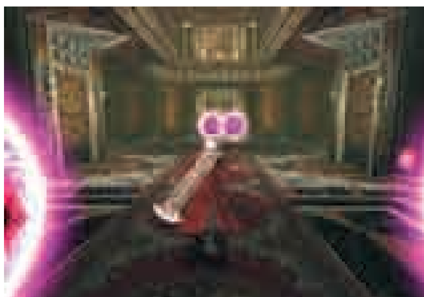


Big, ugly goat demon against man with long overcoat and a sword that's as big as he is… we'll put our money on Dante, thanks very much.



While Dante still retains his Devil Trigger mode, Lucia's seems to turn her into more of an angel than anything else – not that we know why.

"ALL THE MAKINGS OF A CLASSIC SEQUEL ARE HERE: DEMON-SLAYER DANTE COMPLETE WITH BIG SWORDS AND EVEN BIGGER GUNS"



Big pink balls are always threatening, but these ones send you screaming back to the demon world if you so much as touch one.



See? This is the Dante we like – pointing guns and looking like a bad-ass. So why does it happen so rarely in this sequel? Bah.

safe spot, dodging the odd attack and just blasting away with your long-range arsenal, rather than getting in there with your sword – not exactly inspired considering that it's been done so much better before.

The problem of using guns over swordplay doesn't just end with the bosses; there are hardly any enemies that offer a genuine threat, which takes away much of what little scare factor the game already had. Of course, you could probably get over this if the actual weapons you used were flashy and interesting, but they're not. Not only is your arsenal rather flaccid and obvious compared to before (while your basic pistols and shotgun are nice, guns like the Machine Guns and even the Rocket Launcher don't feel that impressive) but the swords are also boring against previous examples like Alastor or Ifrit from the first game. Again, it seems to be a case of the game being 'toned down' from what it once was, which isn't what the fans want.

Other problems also appear in the form of 'improvements' that don't actually enhance the gameplay – for instance, virtually all of the puzzles in the game have been replaced with 'hit the glowing thing with your sword' tasks, which makes for some incredibly dull gameplay at times. Even the 'secret' areas (which once required some finding and presented unique challenges) have been reduced to easy-to-find rooms with some enemies to kill – nothing more, nothing less. The change in setting means that virtually every stage is different, which is obviously a good thing. However, the removal of the need to backtrack through previous areas means each level involves little more than running from point A to point B

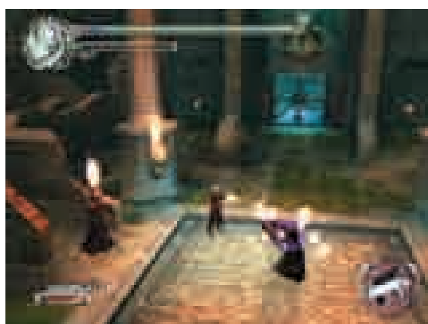


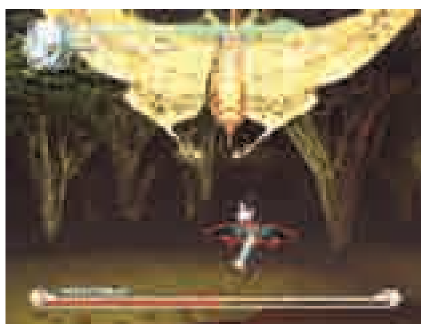
It's a rare occurrence; a game with a monkey in it that we don't absolutely love to pieces. Damn.



Now that's what we call evil – rotting flesh and some wickedly bad breath to boot. Jeez… fancy a Tic Tac, mate?

"AFTER THE STORYTELLING, LOGICAL PUZZLES AND FRANTIC SLAUGHTER IN DEVIL MAY CRY, THE SEQUEL SEEMS LIKE IT'S HAD ALL THE ESSENCE REMOVED"





while killing anything that gets in your way. Worst of all though are Dante and new girl Lucia's improved acrobatic stylings; while impressive, they ultimately amount to nothing. Abilities such as running up walls, shooting in two directions at once and being able to fire straight down in mid-air might look lovely and make your friends go 'ooh' when you give them a demonstration, but they don't actually improve the gameplay. Why? Because you'll never need to use them, that's why. The sad thing is that all these things might sound like enhancements on paper but when they're detrimental to the gameplay or just plain unnecessary… well, what's the point?

Despite all this negativity though, what's strange is that *Devil May Cry 2* can't really be called a 'bad' game. Indeed, numerous shortcomings aside, the strong visuals combined with the non-stop action make for a fairly solid, if repetitive, gaming experience. Unfortunately, the whole thing feels incredibly soulless when compared to the original. Having experienced the rich combination of storytelling, logical puzzles and frantic demon slaughter in *Devil May Cry*, the sequel just seems like it's had all the essence removed. Typically, it's a case of not missing what you haven't had – those of you who are new to the series will most likely revel in the demon-slaying glory, while more experienced gamers will feel the same disappointment we did.

In the end, we just can't help feeling that in trying to make the game appeal to a more mainstream audience (which is quite clearly what has happened – though God knows why developers feel that making a game mainstream means they have to dumb it down), Capcom has accidentally taken out all the things that made *Devil May Cry* worth playing in the first place; something that can be said for quite a few titles these days. Ultimately, it's a crying shame (no pun intended, of course) – we just hope Capcom can pull its socks up when it finally decides to get cracking on the next one.

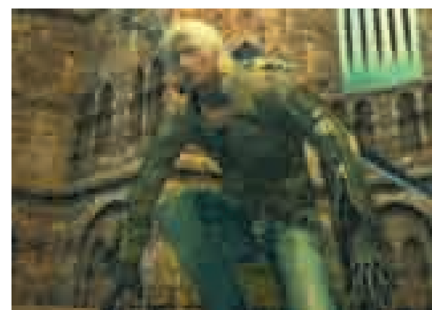


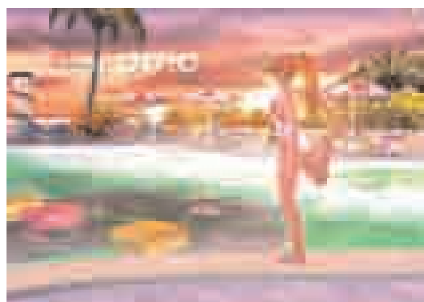
VERDICT 6/10

OH, DANTE… WHAT'S HAPPENED TO YOU?

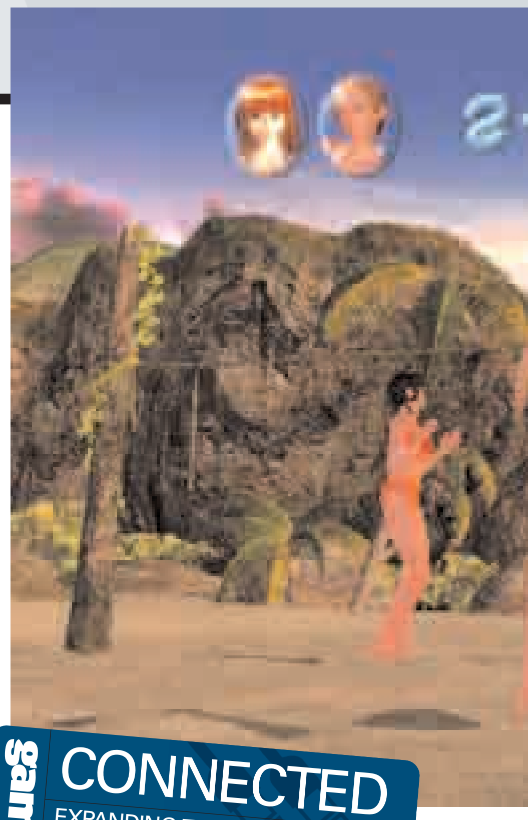
FASHION VICTIM

We're all for characters in adventure games having new and exciting bonus costumes to run around in after you've managed to complete the game once, but when those clothes turn out to be actual designer outfits… well, that's when we get a bit worried. It seems that during the process of developing *Devil May Cry 2*, leading fashion company Diesel came along and suggested putting some of its clothes on Dante and Lucia – and someone at Capcom actually agreed. Did someone get some free Diesel clothing out of the deal? Possibly. When it comes down to it though, watching Dante run around in Diesel jeans and a snazzy shirt is quite a laugh but naturally, it's only a neat addition and not exactly something that makes the game any more fun to play.




It may look silly and, quite frankly, it is. But hopping across floating cushions is a curiously enjoyable way of earning extra cash.


Kasumi and Lisa both eye the ball as it comes over the net towards them. If you know what you're doing, you can line up some pretty impressive shots.



DEAD OR ALIVE XTREME BEACH VOLLEYBALL

IMAGINE A TROPICAL ISLAND WHERE EIGHT GORGEOUS GIRLS ARE LOOKING FOR SOMEONE TO PLAY WITH…

games™ CONNECTED
EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY
I WILL SURVIVE: *If you own both Dead Or Alive 3 and Dead Or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball, you can earn extra money to spend in the stores on Zack Island by playing the survival mode in DOA3.*

DETAILS

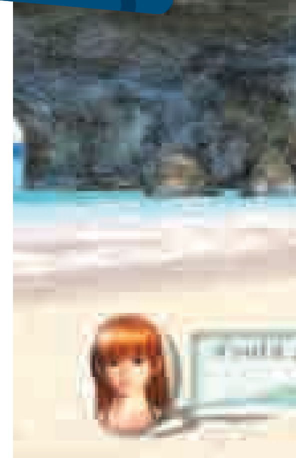
FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox
ORIGIN
Japan
PUBLISHER
Microsoft
DEVELOPER
Tecmo
PRICE
£44.99
RELEASE
Out Now
PLAYERS
1-2

Boobs. That's what most people associate with *Dead Or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball*. Well, boobs and the semi-naked cast of the *Dead Or Alive* fighting games bouncing around on a sunny beach in skimpy bikinis. And why not – that's exactly the way Microsoft has been marketing it, after all. But breasts aside, what gamers have been asking all along is whether a quality game lies hidden behind all this surface gloss. Now that *DOAXBV* has arrived we can reveal, after a lengthy playtest, that there *is* a game behind the eye-catching visuals, though perhaps not the game that some were expecting. You see, this isn't so much a volleyball title as a party game based around the fictional dream holiday resort of Zack Island. Apart from the gleaming golden sands on which the volleyball takes place, the island boasts other activities such as shopping, gambling and swimming. What's even more surprising is that these other activities take up as much, if not more, time than the volleyball itself.

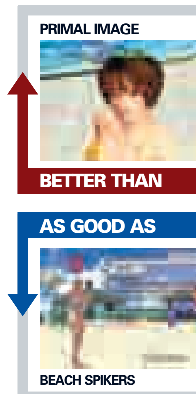
It's clear that this isn't going to be a regular sports game from the outset. After a gratuitous FMV opening sequence (which includes a glimpse of, yes, you guessed it, naked paps), the game starts with a comedy *Titanic*-inspired boat trip to Zack Island. You then get the option to choose one of the eight girls available, before being introduced to the island by newcomer Lisa. From then on, it's up to you how you spend the next 14 days. Each day is broken up into morning, afternoon and evening sessions and you get your first opportunity to play volleyball on the evening of the first day. This is done by selecting one of the four locations on offer – Niki Beach (named after Zack's girlfriend), Private Beach, Jungle or Bass Island (as long as the tide is out). Miniature portraits show which girls (if any) are present at each location, and from there you can choose to offer one of them a gift in an attempt to build a friendship, ask them if they'd like to team up with you, or play a game of volleyball against them.

Because of the relaxed summer holiday atmosphere of this title, the volleyball games don't adhere to the sort of rigid rules you might expect to see in a title such as *Beach Spikers*. There are no boundaries or markers to indicate where the edges of the court lie and the entire match is played using just the left analogue stick and the A and B buttons. Tecmo has also made the unusual decision of keeping the camera at the side of the court, which, as you'd expect, occasionally obscures the action a little. Naturally, this raises questions regarding playability and, initially, the action seems completely random. But stick with it and you soon discover that many different moves and variations are possible depending on how hard you press the button, how long you hold the button and your proximity to the net.

As you'd expect, Tecmo's visuals are top notch; footprints appear in the sand as the girls walk



PRIMAL IMAGE
BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS

BEACH SPIKERS



During play, the camera stays at the side of the court. The replay is more, um, revealing.

FAQs

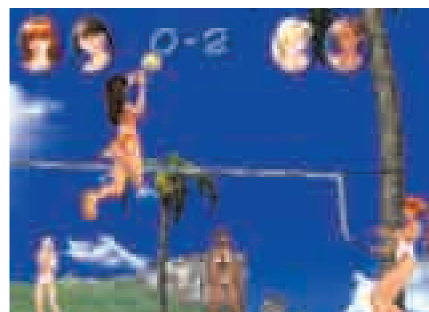
Q. MUSIC?
A number of licensed acts are featured in the game, including The Spice Girls, B*Witched, Christina Aguilera and Bob Marley.

Q. JAPANESE OR ENGLISH?
All the characters voices are Japanese with the exception of Zack, who's voiced by Dennis Rodman. Luckily, you can choose to switch his voice to Japanese in the options, as Rodman is rubbish.

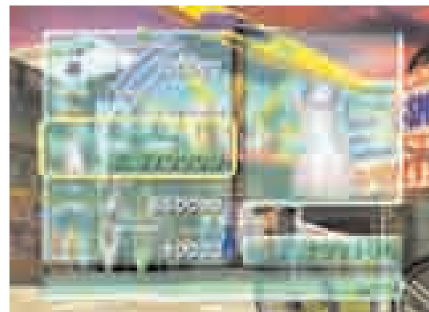
Q. HOW MANY BIKINIS?
There's room for over 300 in the swimsuit collection screen.






Everyone watches in amazement as little Lei Fang power smashes the ball over the net. You go, girl.


You can't play volleyball if you don't have a partner. So Kasumi's attempting to make friends with the comely Tina.


You'll need the Sports shop for swimsuits, the Accessories shop for fashion items and Zack Of All Trades for everything else.

over it, palm trees sway in the breeze and sunlight glimmers on the rippling ocean. But what makes *DOAXBV* stand out from just about every other game ever released in the West is that you need to keep your partner happy if she's to stay with you for your fortnight on the island. This is done by winning games of volleyball to earn money and by buying presents for her from one of the three stores on the island (you can also buy items for yourself if you wish). You need to take into account her favourite colour, food and hobbies if you're going to choose a gift she'll like – if you don't, she'll throw it in the bin or even break off your friendship if she becomes particularly unhappy. If that happens, you'll need to team up with one of the other girls by buying gifts until she agrees to be your partner.

You're probably thinking that this all sounds rather bizarre and not really that good. Chances are you won't be alone, though you may be missing the point. Tecmo has tried to create the laid-back feel of a summer holiday, complete with all the activities you could wish for. The worst fault it has is that only two people can compete simultaneously, rather than four – the unusual camera view would probably make such a thing unplayable anyway. Despite such obvious limitations, Tecmo has actually achieved what it set out to do; *Dead Or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* includes all the elements the developers had planned and will almost certainly catch the eye of casual gamers. And, of course, it's also great fun.



VERDICT 6/10
NOT WHAT YOU MIGHT EXPECT, BUT STILL GREAT FUN

VOLLEYBALL VEGAS

When you return to your hotel room in the evening, a present from Zack will be there. This can be anything from a new bikini or fashion accessory to a prototype Xbox or a video of one of Tecmo's other games. You can also prepare gifts for the other girls and choose which clothes to wear the next day. You also get the opportunity to go to the hotel casino where there are eight different fruit machines, a roulette table, poker and blackjack – and all of these can be played to multiply your money. You can stay in the casino as long as you like, but it may leave you tired the following day. Don't worry though, you can always sleep it off by the pool. It's a hard life…

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

BREAK STUFF: Entire cities can be reduced to rubble in the course of battle.

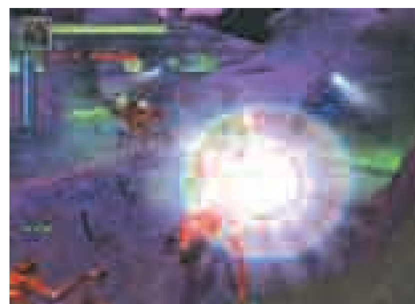
DOUBLE TEAM: Two-player is mildly distracting – the split-screen merges into one when you're near each other.



The Godzilla twins pick on Magmo, the lava golem, roaring something about his dinner money. Of course, when Magmo's mum finds out, she'll be straight round to the Godzilla's bungalow to give that Mrs Godzilla a piece of her mind. Those lizards need a damn good hiding…



Kineticlops is one of the more original creatures and also among the more tongue in cheek.



Impressive pummelling all right, but just three bugs? Does that even constitute a war?

WAR OF THE MONSTERS

APES, DINOSAURS, ROBOTS… ALL THE USUAL SUSPECTS ARE IN THIS LARGER-THAN-LIFE FIGHTER

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SCEE

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
11 April '03

PLAYERS
1-2

We've always had something of a soft spot for Godzilla. It's hard not to, really – with the pitiful 'man in a monster suit' special effects and his many unlikely (not to mention comical) adversaries, we'll always have a place in our hearts for the big lug. In recent years, though, our favourite Japanese monster has been publicly humiliated thanks to a big-budget Hollywood turkey and a disappointing GameCube outing (soon to be Xbox-bound, too). But this hasn't stopped Sony jumping on the behemoth bandwagon. *War Of The Monsters* pits a cast of predictable B-movie-inspired creatures against one another in similarly familiar locations. Giant bugs, huge apes, oversized robots, a prehistoric Godzilla wannabe (as close as you can get without infringing copyright)… they're all here.

Setting two or more hulking monsters against each other in fully destructible cityscapes is undoubtedly an enjoyable prospect, but it becomes apparent all too quickly that this is not as well executed as it is presented. The front end reeks of Fifties monster movies and gives exactly the right mood, but this is shattered as soon as you get into the action, which is all neon colours and modern design. Worse still, the game is nightmarishly overcomplicated, with multiple button presses and holds needed to execute simple moves that could have been assigned to stick clicks, D-pad direction or the like. There are fundamental flaws in several of the game modes too, whereby battles can be drawn out over lengthy periods of time but the entire landscape will be levelled and all power-ups used within the first few encounters, rendering the many bouts that follow nothing more than a button-bashing chore.

Other than its rather showy visuals, there's little beneath the surface to get excited about. Sluggish and unresponsive controls, unbalanced gameplay (the AI is terrible – opponents know the location of every power-up and grab them sharpish) and the lack of support for more than two players all spoil the overall experience, yet still the game is curiously enjoyable in brief bursts. We're convinced that it must be possible for the *Rampage* formula to be successful in three dimensions, but our confidence in this is running dry. If we don't see a decent monster fighter in the near future, we might be tempted to say this is a genre that's gone the way of the point and click adventure. *King Of The Monsters* and *Rampage*, you have nothing to fear from this monstrosity.

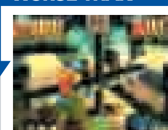
VERDICT 4/10
A CLASH OF STYLES AND A SUB-PAR FIGHTER

GODZILLA: DESTROY ALL MONSTERS MELEE



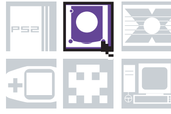
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



POWER STONE

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
Namco

PRICE
£59.99 (Import)

RELEASE
TBA (Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-4

THE MAN WHO MADE MINING FUN MAKES HIS GAMECUBE DEBUT

MR DRILLER: DRILL LAND

Here's a question for you – what happens to all those blocks that you leave behind after a miserable attempt to beat your friend's *Tetris* high score? Somebody has to clean them up, right? Right. That man is Mr Driller. Okay, so that's not really the plot, but it may as well be. Having already made mining cool on Dreamcast, PC and Game Boy (to name but a few), Mr Driller's next port of call is the GameCube. The trailer for this gem on the Zelda bonus disc has kept us going until now, but at last our excavation can commence anew in *Drill Land*. And the verdict? Drilling is his business and business is good…

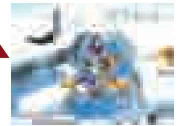
We've always rated the *Mr Driller* games – unashamedly simple yet horribly playable and addictive. The series may not look much better this time around, but by adding new game modes, characters and features it feels new enough. Drill Land is based around a central hub area of the same name, from which you can access several different game modes, shops and galleries. Some of these modes are just classic drilling action while others take more varied slants on the block destruction – *Drindy Adventure* removes the time and air limits but adds traps and hazards; *Star Driller* is a more frantic version of the action with power-ups galore; while *Hole Of Druaga* and *Horror Night House* stray from the beaten track the most. The former incorporates RPG-lite elements while the latter requires you to slay bats and ghosts in a *Castlevania*-style setting, all the while drilling away as usual.

Behind the slightly smoother visuals and a few minor gameplay changes, *Mr Driller* is exactly the same as it's always been. It'd be pointless trying to change it, though – the formula has been correct since day one and a major overhaul would most likely bring about disaster. If you somehow tire of drilling, there's always the opportunity to go shopping too – collectible cards, items and power-ups for the different modes are all up for grabs, as well as several theatres and galleries. You may actually find yourself using these as well – they're a genuinely great way to break up the action, and some of the in-game music is absolutely wonderful. Providing he can keep coming back with bigger and better adventures like this, we can't see Mr Driller gasping for air any time soon.



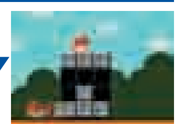
VERDICT 8/10
EASILY THE GAMECUBE'S BEST PUZZLE GAME

ZOOCUBE



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



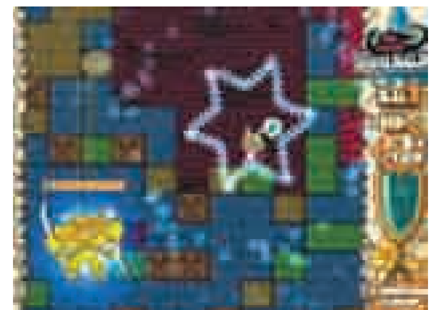
POPILS



Fans of the original games will no doubt enjoy *Star Driller* – less colours and hazards make for a faster game. Proof, if proof were needed, that happiness is not a cigar called Hamlet, but a screen full of coloured blocks and a limited air supply…

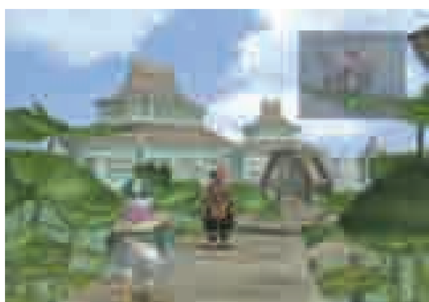


The cast of six unlikely heroes (including a dog) can be expanded by proving your worth on the drilling circuit.



The Hole Of Druaga has enemies, items and even bosses to keep you occupied. And you thought drilling was dull.


Using Runes in battle will produce a suitably impressive pyrotechnic display.


Any game that allows you to visit a village populated by talking ducks is okay by us.



Chris Lightfellow is one of the three characters you can control using the innovative Trinity Sight System.

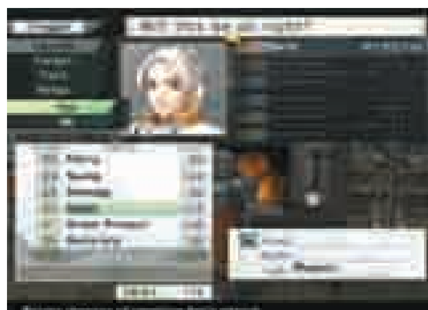
SUIKODEN III

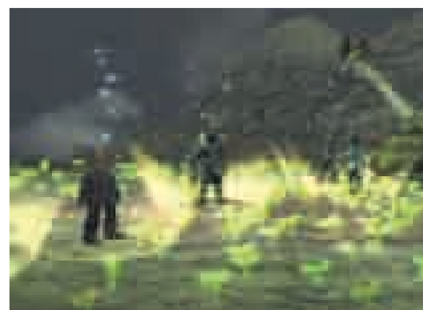
KONAMI COMPLETES THIS TRILOGY WITH A TRINITY. CONFUSED? READ ON…

Making the leap from two dimensions into three can be an extremely risky move. Some have triumphed (look at Mario and Samus) while many others have fallen flat on their faces – shameful polygonal outings soiled the reputations of *Bubsy* and *Castlevania*, for instance. Thankfully, RPGs tend to be a different matter. Since a lot of the gameplay is based around systems and menus, graphics rarely drastically improve or impair the experience. *Final Fantasy VII*'s chunky characters blasted the series into the 32-bit era and even titles like *Grandia* and *Chrono Trigger* have received three-dimensional sequels. Now it's the turn of Konami's cult series to realise its z-axis potential, but can it do so with the same level of class as its RPG rivals?

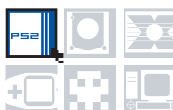
The reason we're covering this nearly six months after its US release is because the game is no longer coming to Europe. Sad news indeed, so we thought we should give PAL gamers the low-down on just what it is that they're missing out on. Set some fifteen years after the events of *Suikoden II*, the storyline revolves around the political and military instability of the Grasslands region. This may not sound enthralling, but it's given such a personal feel through the Trinity Sight System (see Triple Vision) that you really will find yourself getting utterly engrossed. Annoyingly, though, almost every aspect of the game is a double-edged delight.

Firstly, while previous adventures boasted total freedom to roam the globe, this time your


Skill Points earned from combat can be used to strengthen existing abilities or even learn brand new ones.


All of the Rune abilities are accompanied with huge light shows and special effects, like this all-too-rare healing spell.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

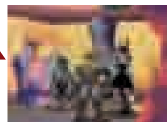
DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£49.99 (US Import)

RELEASE
Out Now

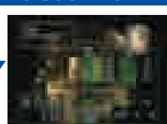
PLAYERS
1

TIME STALKERS



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



SUIKODEN II

FAQs

Q. 108 STARS?
That's right, the 108 Stars Of Destiny return and, as before, you'll have your work cut out recruiting them all.

Q. WHERE'S YOUR BASE?
Like in previous games, you'll eventually get your own castle that will expand as your numbers increase.

Q. INTRO MOVIE?
Yes indeed, and it's a veritable beauty – the five minutes of glorious animé set the scene wonderfully. Lovely.

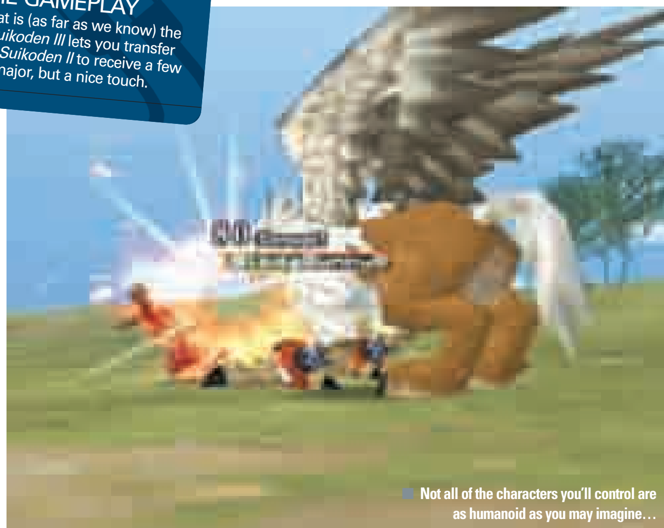
CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

OLD SCHOOL: In what is (as far as we know) the first example of this, *Suikoden III* lets you transfer your save from PSone *Suikoden II* to receive a few bonus items. Nothing major, but a nice touch.



Landscapes and characters are beautifully realised, but watch out for the odd PSone glitch.



Not all of the characters you'll control are as humanoid as you may imagine…

adventure takes a more structured path similar to *Final Fantasy Tactics*. The expansive maps (particularly in *Suikoden II*) could become somewhat daunting and confusing so it's easy to see why this decision has been made, but that doesn't detract from the fact that it eliminates a fair chunk of the freedom to explore that RPG fans tend to be so fond of. The sound and graphics are of a variable quality – so much so that you'll swear the action momentarily cuts to a different game. For the most part, this looks and sounds as good as any PS2 adventure but, without warning, you're occasionally subjected to moments of near-PSone quality models and textures or 16-bit MIDI-esque loops. This is possibly the most aesthetically erratic game that we've encountered in a long time, drifting from the sublime to the ridiculous.

Battles are also a tough aspect to call – there are three types of battle available, all of which have been tweaked at least a little since they were last used. Duelling has undergone minor alterations while the regular group combat and large-scale group battles have changed fairly substantially. Epic battles are now noticeably simpler and less impressive but remain almost as strategic as before, while normal group battles are the most changed. As always, six characters form your party (with an extra support character) but in a major twist, all action is taken in pairs. Each of the three couples can be instructed to perform an action (if one of these is specific to one character, his or her partner is AI controlled for that turn), and while this may not sound particularly special – or seem it until you begin to see its more strategic uses – it actually works remarkably well.

The deeper you delve into this mixed bag, the more great intricacies you'll discover. Much like the PS2's other unsung RPG hero *Legaia 2: Duel Saga*, there's probably more to do in terms of mini-games, sub-quests, conversation and exploration than there is to do following the main adventure.



It's nice to see sensitive issues such as alcoholism addressed in today's games. Or, er, not, as the case may be.

You'll find yourself actually caring about collecting an entire set of books and fretting over which ornaments should decorate your bathroom – losing hours to the evil mini-games is also not something to be taken lightly.

The bottom line is: if you enjoyed the previous two games, you'll more than likely get on very well with this gem. Sure, a lot has changed since it's pixellated beginnings but that's evolution for you. While not every change has been for the better, many others manage to improve the experience – these are what keep the game fresh while remaining notably true to the *Suikoden* world. It's in no way flawless but *Suikoden III* is as good an RPG as you'll find on the PS2 at the moment, offering a huge and absorbing experience. With all the pleas for European releases of this and *Winning Eleven 6: FE*, we reckon Konami's email system will take quite a hammering this month…



VERDICT 8/10

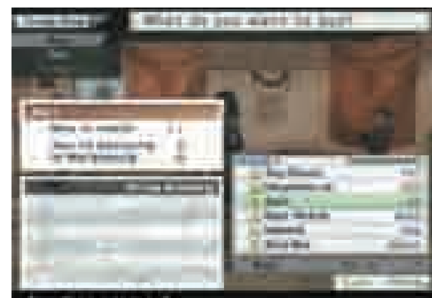
A WORTHY CONTINUATION OF A GREAT SERIES

TRIPLE VISION

One of the best features of the game is the wonderful story and its implementation through the Trinity Sight System. Viewing the narrative through the eyes of one of three characters (expandable to six as you progress), you'll see the storylines develop and intertwine as parties meet, visit familiar locations and face off or join forces, depending on who you choose. Available from the start are Geddoe (commander of a small Harmonian defence force), Chris (a high ranking Knight of Zexen) and Hugo, son of a Grassland clan chief – each of these has a very different view on the action but the way they merge seamlessly is beautiful.



The world map freedom of the previous games vanishes in favour of this routed landscape.

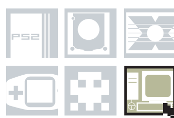


Once you've visited a few towns, you'll be able to establish trade routes between them to earn some extra cash.

UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING

EXPECTING THIS TO BE AMAZING? THEN YOU'RE IN FOR A RATHER RUDE AWAKENING…

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Infogrames

DEVELOPER
Legend Entertainment

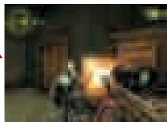
PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

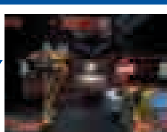
MINIMUM SPECS
733 MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 3GB free hard disk space, 8x CD-ROM drive, 32MB NVIDIA GeForce2 MX graphics card

RED FACTION



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003

Yes, yes – we know that *Unreal II* was, until its release, one of the most highly anticipated PC games of the spring. Before launching into the whole 'Is it as good as you were expecting?' rant though, it's worth pointing out that unless you're lucky enough to own a PC that pushes the top of the range, you may well find that you'll have immense difficulty loading this game. Indeed, it needs a whopping 3GB of hard disk space plus a minimum GeForce2 MX graphics card before you can even have a sniff of what the label promises you – not exactly what you might call the most user-friendly set-up in the world.

Of course, if you overcome that hurdle (and there will most likely be quite a few of you who can) then your first impressions from the intro should be pretty positive – a vast spaceship appears dwarfed by a gigantic planet with a striking hotspot in the centre, while a shuttle craft rises to meet it. Stirring stuff, and when you later get to explore both the ship and the other worlds where the action takes place, the level of landscape grandeur, lighting and weather effects and character detail is impressive enough to make you choke on your Cheerios. Whether or not you remember the storyline of the original game makes little difference, as eight years have passed since the Strider Wars ended and Earth corporations have pushed further into space, hungry for colonisation. Each corporation keeps its own private mercenaries, of which you are one. Your character, John Dalton, is a sci-fi version of Wyatt Earp who belongs to the Terran Colonial Authority and has to act almost as a one-man police force amongst these largely hostile planets.



If only all ship commander's assistants looked like this…

In keeping with 'man takes on alien scum' stock sci-fi storyline present here, the gameplay offers few surprises – get tooled up, descend to a planet and start the mission while trying to avoid having your backside shot off by your old foes the Skaarj and a wide variety of other intergalactic beasts. These missions range from hostage rescue and defending outposts to escorting civilians and simple search-and-destroy, across a wide range of planetary surfaces (mountains, underwater, Geiger-like, jungle, icy and so on) that provide oodles of atmosphere. They are further enhanced by a clever use of

FAQs

Q: WHERE'S THE MULTIPLAYER?
Wrong game, bub – that's *Unreal Tournament*. However, you can download and share files created with the Unreal Editor.

Q: IT WON'T RUN!
That's because you didn't buy your PC less than six months ago – you'll need at least 3GB of hard disk space and a high-end graphics card before you can even touch *Unreal II*.

Q: ANY CHARACTER INTERACTION?
There certainly is – in fact, you can even interrupt them in the middle of a sentence and they're trained to react with appropriate emotion. Blimey.



If you easily fall in love with gorgeous landscapes then this must be heaven.



If you're fed up with conventional blasters, just pick up the alien version of a cattle prod.



directional sound, which is geared to let you know the enemy is there, but not where he'll come at you from. Thankfully, the AI is sufficiently intelligent to remind your foes to duck out the way when you're blazing away, or to seek you out and overcome you by sheer force of numbers (which is the more common approach at the end of each mission). On a one-to-one basis though, they tend to come at you full-on, which gives you plenty of time to blast them with your grenade launcher, combat assault rifle or the ever-popular flamethrower. It's very much the usual suspects when it comes to the weaponry, although you can capture and use alien hardware like the Shock Lance, Leech Gun and the hunter/seeker Takkra. All the weapons have a secondary mode as well – for example, the rocket launcher's primary fire has four rockets bound together, while the secondary releases them individually and erratically (handy for causing a bit of random carnage).

With 12 missions in all, it soon becomes blindingly clear that you're not just expected to shoot everything that moves, but to uncover and protect seven dangerous alien artefacts that your enemies would cheerfully kill to own. Although that does give some shape to the gameplay, it still tends to follow the pattern of slowly building up to a boss battle. Once you've sussed how to strafe and hide sufficiently to complete each level, you'll find yourself sailing through to the end of the game in an estimated ten hours. Strangely though, the final two levels suddenly cause the game to spring to life and maybe if more time had been spent on making the others less routine as well you might not have noticed how quickly the game was over. Admittedly, there are a number of cut-scenes that keep the plot moving, but after a while you get a bit tired of seeing the shuttle leave the mothership and float down to the next planet. Even worse, skipping these isn't an option and the load times between levels can be fairly substantial if your PC is already at full stretch.

■ Okay, so we'll admit you're probably in some sort of mortal danger here, but just take a minute to admire the graphics. It's nice to die in such superbly realised locations…



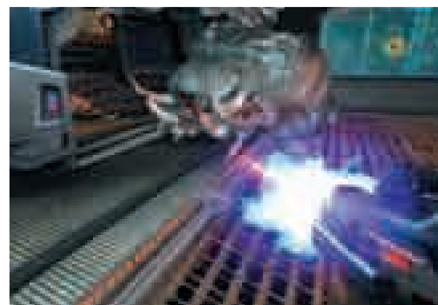
■ Flamethrowers should prove useful when it comes to tackling particularly resilient alien scum.

Unfortunately, because there's no multiplayer capability at all and virtually no incentive to replay the game (apart from gazing awestruck at the pretty pictures again), you'll soon abandon it in favour of the superior *Unreal Tournament 2003* or whine plaintively until *Doom III* arrives simply because this is so short-lived. It's a shame really because by rights *Unreal II* should have been something – it should have been, as Marlon Brando once said, 'a contender'. Instead it became a stunningly attractive also-ran.

VERDICT 6/10
ALL STYLE AND ONLY A TOUCH OF SUBSTANCE

CREEPY CRAWLIES

Fans of the first *Unreal* will be familiar with the ugly Skaarj who pop up regularly and do their darndest to tear off chunks of your flesh. But they're not the only ET's to make you want to phone home – giant spider-like creatures that have been biologically engineered now scuttle around corners and spit at you (albeit comparatively slowly), while *Alien*-type clones, mech lookalikes, fat aliens firing blobs and fearsome animals with tusks and scaly tails all try to get a piece of you at the same time. There are even other humanoids who look and act like you, but can sometimes be smarter. No matter what you're shooting though, there's nothing as satisfying as seeing your shot hit its target.





games™ ENHANCED

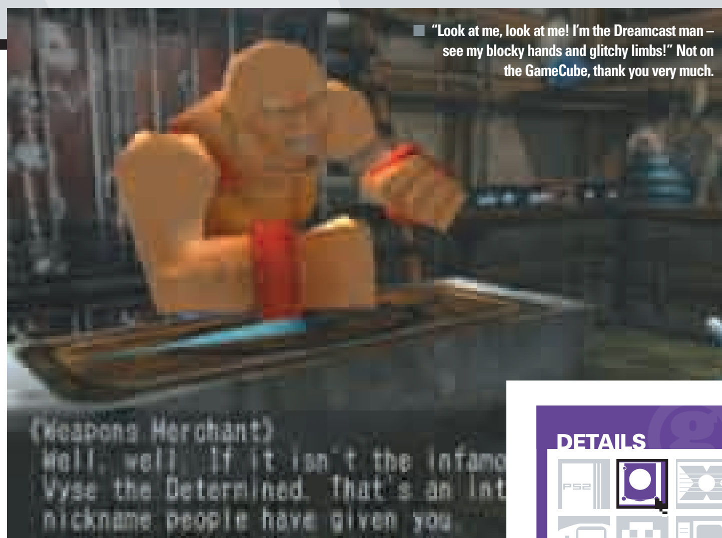
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

MMM, PRETTY: Despite the lacklustre gameplay, you have to admit the graphics are a real treat.

WEIRD GUNS: There are several fun alien weapons that blast, spit and explode all kinds of death.

They're an odd-looking crew, but with a game as good as this, who's complaining?



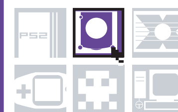


"Look at me, look at me! I'm the Dreamcast man – see my blocky hands and glitchy limbs!" Not on the GameCube, thank you very much.



It's hard enough beating Piastol the first time, but rest assured that it isn't the last encounter with her…

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Infogrames

DEVELOPER
SEGA (Overworks)

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

SKIES



That Vyse is a cocky young blade – just the sort to take on any ne'er-do-wells who might be floating around.

FAQs

Q. IS PIASTOL PLAYABLE?
Nope. As a bounty hunter gunning for the price on Vyse's head, don't expect her to change sides just like that…

Q. WHERE'S PINTA'S QUEST?
It's vanished without a trace, unfortunately – our hopes that it would use the GBA link-up have been dashed.

Q. WHAT'S WITH THE LEGO MEN?
Skies Of Arcadia was, is and always will be a Dreamcast game. It's been slightly polished but still ends up looking a little dated.



Imagine a world where floating continents hover above nothingness. Sky vessels resembling galleons and battleships serve as the only transport between the mystical landmasses. Powered by fallen Moon Stones, the ships sail with mixed purposes. Traders peddle their wares, pirates go about their evil (or not-so-evil) business and the Valuan Armada grows steadily in both power and numbers. Welcome to Arcadia. Set in this beautifully realised fantasy world, *Skies Of Arcadia Legends* is little more than a special edition re-release of one of the Dreamcast's finest hours. While this is the case, every effort has clearly been made to ensure that even those who have already seen the game through will have good reason to enjoy the rise of Vyse and friends once more. Well okay, maybe not every effort…

It seems crazy that despite the success of the likes of the *Final Fantasy* series and the *Pokémon* games, both the Xbox and the GameCube find themselves all but bereft of decent RPGs. Racing games? Plenty, thanks. Dodgy adventures that nobody really cares about? Check. But when it comes to involving and epic adventures packed with more numbers than *Countdown*, there really are surprisingly few. While the need for original games is still waiting to be met, we'll take what we're given in terms of RPGs right now – so when SEGA's update of *Skies Of Arcadia* finally appeared in the States, we simply had to have it. Early reports spoke of upgrades and enhancements galore – it sounded as though this would be almost a new game. Now at last we have the article in our possession but just how many of their claims and our wishes have come true? Precious few, unfortunately…

Bad news first: *Legends* still looks like a Dreamcast game. Don't get us wrong – in its day *Skies Of Arcadia* was a stunning title but with technology advancing at such a rate, it hasn't taken long for *Arcadia* to be left behind. It still has moments of true splendour, but the general look is that of the previous generation. Sound is something of a mixed bag – effects occasionally overlap a little sloppily but the music is as glorious and triumphant as ever and the spoken lines work well, even if some of them are repeated a little too often. The good news is a whole lot sweeter – those with fond memories of the original game will not be disappointed as the package goes largely unaltered, with those areas that have been tweaked being better for it. There was initially some talk of ship battles being altered to make them faster and more action-orientated but even after sending the Little Jack into countless airborne encounters we saw no real differences.

Given the lack of competition, we can already safely say that this is by far the best true RPG on Nintendo's cubic console. The whole experience may well be a new one for dedicated Cubers but it's one to get used to – with the likes of *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles* on the way, *Skies Of Arcadia Legends* is not only a wonderful example of the genre but also a great starting block for new role-players. Despite the lacklustre appearance in places, the story, characters and involvement somehow conspire to draw you in and not let go until you're done with the game. Whether due to familiarity or its somewhat ungraceful appearance, the whole experience seems to be marginally less engrossing than the Dreamcast version, but since we were compelled to play through again it can't have been too bad.

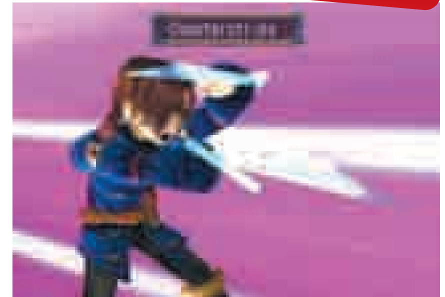
Once you get past the lack of visual polish, you'll find that *Arcadia*'s gameplay has aged far better than its looks. Random encounters, one of the few areas that were slammed in the original Dreamcast game, have been reduced but those that remain are more rewarding and the game benefits for it. The real question is: is there enough here to warrant buying and playing *Legends* again if you already did so on its original format? In all honesty, we think there probably is. The more cynical among you may not be interested in all the little extras that have been included for this re-release but, like a good film, this would have been worth experiencing again even if it hadn't been enhanced in any way. New players too should revel in the fact that the GameCube now has a title that merits some quality time, and while it may not be the prettiest game to hit the console, it's certainly among the most compelling and enjoyable. If it weren't for a heavy sense of déjà vu and its outdated appearance, the final score may well be a figure or two higher, but as it stands, a lot of the impact has been lost second time around.

VERDICT 7/10

A SUPERB YET DATED ADVENTURE THAT LACKS POLISH

OF ARCADIA LEGENDS

AT LONG LAST, A GAMECUBE RPG. BETTER STILL, IT'S A GOOD ONE



Many of the flashy effects that accompany special skills have scrubbed up pretty well.



Not everything in this game is as lovable as pretty boy Vyse.

PIASTOL WHIPPED

Early rumours that Piastol would be a playable character were untrue – once your band of Air Pirates starts making a name for itself, she'll start coming after you. As Vyse's bounty hunting arch rival, she crops up on numerous occasions as an optional (and highly challenging) boss. She's worth taking on, though – our party managed to gain several levels and get rich And without wishing to be indiscreet, Piastol and Vyse have something of a history…





Although many of the special effects look very pretty, they can make it difficult to see exactly what's going on.



There are 20 characters to choose from, though some of them are a bit too similar to one another.



Like a lot of Japanese anime movies, *Guilty Gear X2* can be surprisingly violent and gory.



A NEW 2D FIGHTING GAME, AND SURPRISINGLY IT'S NOT BY CAPCOM OR SNK

GUILTY GEAR X2

DETAILS

PS2

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Sammy

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

Ten years ago, Capcom's *Street Fighter II* was the only one-on-one beat-'em-up gamers cared about. However, it was also ten years ago that SEGA's *Virtua Fighter* series introduced polygons as a feasible method of drawing characters. Now, of course, polygons are commonplace and Capcom's 2D fighting games tend to only attract a small hard-core following. Perhaps it's not surprising then, that much of Capcom's imagery remains fairly crude. Despite crisp 3D backgrounds, the sprites are still low-resolution and seem poorly animated. But, while it may not be financially viable for Capcom to draw a completely new set of high-resolution sprites, Sammy has done just that with its *Guilty Gear* series.

If you're not familiar with *Guilty Gear* (which is likely as it's never really taken off outside Japan), the game centres around a group of human warriors called the Sacred Order of Holy Knights. It's the 22nd Century and, just like in the *Terminator* movies, manmade biological machines called Gears have become self-aware and have declared war against humankind. And what better way to resolve such a dispute but with an organised fighting competition in which any human who defeats the Gears wins $500,000.

Dreadful storyline aside, the high-resolution sprites, vivid colours and striking art style achieve the look and atmosphere of an anime movie. Each character has their own unique weapons and a range of *Street Fighter*-esque moves are on offer. However, there are a few glaring problems that mean *Guilty Gear X2* falls short of the quality of both Capcom and SNK's best. Firstly, the sheer amount going on can lead to utter confusion; with a combination of long-range weapon-based attacks and explosive magic, it's often impossible to see what's going on. On top of that, the characters are shockingly unbalanced – some actually have psychic abilities that can empty an entire energy bar with a single strike.

But while such problems are infuriating, there's still a lot of fun to be had here. Capcom and SNK's games seem to have become a little stagnant lately, and with little else available to satisfy retro gamers' beat-'em-up needs, this comes very close to the mark. If you're a 2D beat-'em-up fan, you may well enjoy *Guilty Gear X2*, but you're probably the only ones.

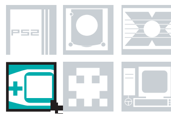
VERDICT 5/10
LOVELY LOOKING, BUT RATHER UNBALANCED GAMEPLAY



YOU'VE HEARD OF POCKET BILLIARDS, NOW THERE'S POCKET TENNIS

VIRTUA TENNIS

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Infogrames

DEVELOPER
Altron

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4

V*irtua Tennis* on the Dreamcast was a winner; its perfect blend of vibrant visuals, fun gameplay and real-life dynamics made it an instant hit with tennis and videogame fans alike. Naturally, the critical and commercial success meant that a sequel wasn't far behind and, amazingly, SEGA Hitmaker managed to make improvements to what was already a brilliant game. *Virtua Tennis 2* was recently translated across to PS2 and now the series has made it to handheld. Theoretically, the game should translate perfectly, but, while Altron has made a bold attempt, it falls short of the mark in a few areas.

You see, both *Virtua Tennis* games were slightly unresponsive because so many animation frames were used for each move. Even so, clever use of the analogue stick made aiming shots second nature and, because the game was so crisp, it still managed to feel totally intuitive. Of course, the GBA doesn't have an analogue stick, which makes things a little less accurate. On top of that, the tiny graphical details that made timing so precise don't exist on this cut-down version, and as the ball moves so quickly across the screen it can be difficult to follow. These issues, combined with the traditionally unresponsive controls, make GBA *Virtua Tennis* feel far less skill-based than the standard console versions.

However, it's not all bad. As well as Tournament and Exhibition modes, there's an in-depth World Tour option. In this you create two characters – a man and a woman – and build up their stats as you take part in events around the world. As in the other versions, a number of mini-games are available which focus on various skills, letting you train your player between matches. Some of these are based around realistic training methods, such as returning balls from a service machine, while others, such as a burger-building event in which you need to target the various ingredients, are decidedly more abstract.

Despite its enormous number of events, the World Tour mode doesn't make GBA *Virtua Tennis* the classic it should be, though it does help combat some of the initial grievances. Once a character has been trained, the controls become slightly more responsive, though issues with ball visibility are still a problem. This game will certainly give you something to get your teeth into, but don't expect anything as balanced or intricate as the original.

VERDICT 6/10
PLENTY TO DO, BUT LIMITED BY THE TECHNOLOGY

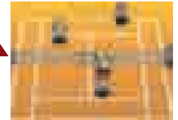
FAQs

Q. REAL TENNIS PLAYERS?
There's a mixture of made-up and real players, but the only well known ones are the Williams sisters.

Q. ALTRON WHO?
Altron is a small Japanese company that focuses on translating games to other formats. The company was responsible for porting *Paper Boy* to the NES.

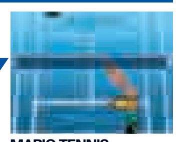
Q. ARE THERE ANY COLLECTIBLES?
Sure – there are 128 secret items to earn.

WTA TOUR TENNIS

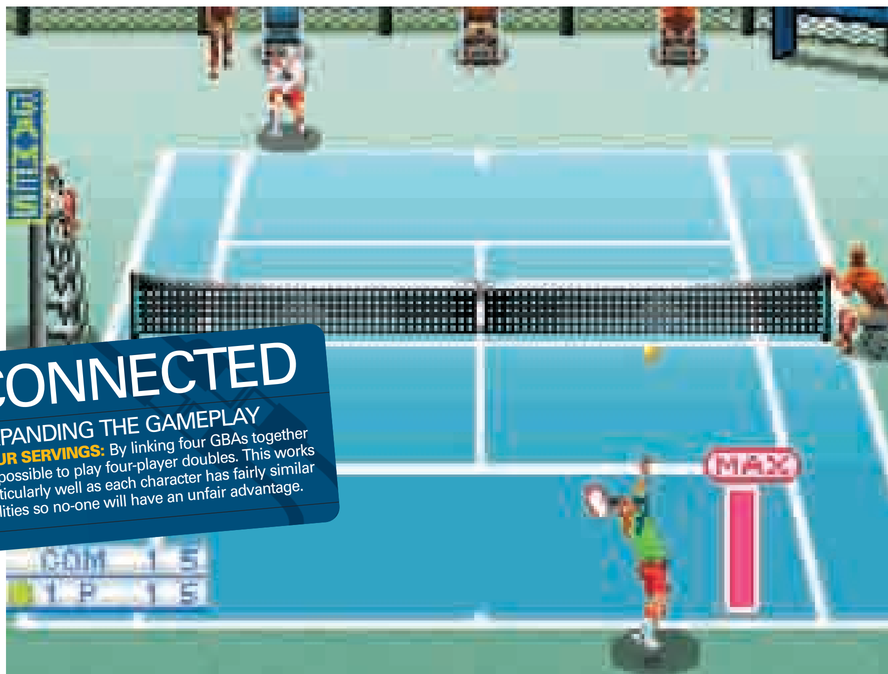


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



MARIO TENNIS



games™ CONNECTED
EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY
FOUR SERVINGS: By linking four GBAs together it's possible to play four-player doubles. This works particularly well as each character has fairly similar abilities so no-one will have an unfair advantage.

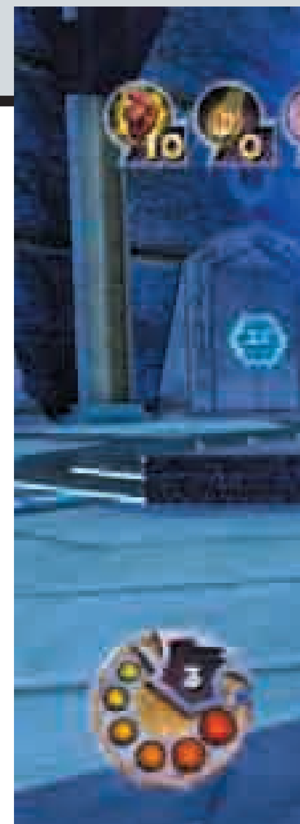
Just like the real game (and just about every other tennis videogame) you have to get the timing right to perform a powerful serve. Swinging your GBA over your head might help, in the same way that shaking the machine will dislodge the ball in *Pinball Of The Dead…*



Some of the training games are completely abstract. In this one you have to add ingredients to the burger by accurately hitting the target.



After deciding where to build your house, you can take part in training games and tennis matches all around the world.



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
GameCube, Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Acclaim

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

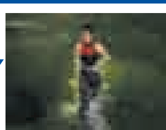
PLAYERS
1

BUBSY 3D



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

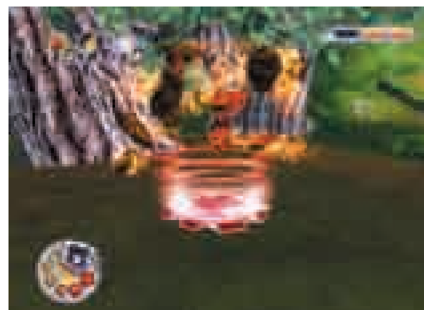


PRIMAL

VEXX

MOVE OVER BLINX – YOU'RE NO LONGER THE LEAST LIKEABLE CHARACTER OF THE 21ST CENTURY…





Every good platform game needs a good gimmick at the heart of it. Something that maybe begins life as a mildly distracting element but soon becomes an integral part of the experience. *Mario 64* had the benefit of being a pioneer (hence not strictly needing a gimmick – consider it the 'exception that proves the rule' if that makes any sense to you) but almost every great platformer since has had one element that causes it to stand out from the crowd. You think of *Mario Sunshine* you think of the FLUDD water pack. *Jak And Daxter* boasted the winning pairing of seamless level transitions and huge areas. Even vilified feline Blinx had at his disposal one of the finest gaming gimmicks in recent memory, even if he couldn't quite travel back in time and suck up the guy who made him so damn slow. When designing *Vexx*, this was obviously taken into account and an ingenious yet unlikely gimmick was concocted. In a stroke of genius, it was decided that *Vexx*'s innovative key element was to be an all but complete lack of a single redeeming quality.

At the heart of a great platformer is also a great storyline, which is probably why *Vexx*'s plot plays out like a middle school drama project or a bad episode of *Hollyoaks*. Yes, maybe his grandfather has been killed by Dark Yabu. Yeah, so perhaps he is bonded to the last pair of Astani Battlegauntlets. But does anyone really care? *Vexx* is a prime example of poor design, in that whatever happens to him you really won't give a damn. When he falls to his death (which you'll see



Vexx can actually play this oversized piano, albeit badly. Still, it's more fun than playing the game properly.



These sundials change night into day, but this might have been a better feature if it actually served a purpose…



WATCH IT, SUNSHINE

Just how much can one game want to be another? As crazy as it sounds, Vexx has a dream – he longs to be a plumber. Wearing his red cap, he'd leap around the land collecting Coins, Stars, Shines… whatever was required of him, in fact. But this will never come to pass. Vexx is not Mario and no matter how much the little fellow may try, he'll never even begin to trouble the Nintendo mascot. Everything *Vexx* does is a pale imitation of something from either of the two most recent *Mario* titles, from collecting Wraithhearts (read: Stars/Shines) to hints at the start of the level to the range of moves on offer, everything feels horribly, horribly familiar.

FAQs

Q. IS IT REALLY THAT BAD?
Yes. Many are sceptical before sampling it, but mere minutes prove us to be correct.

Q. HOW'S THE CAMERA?
Horrible, and while you can alter it with the right analog stick, it normally messes itself up again quickly enough.

Q. ANYTHING GOOD AT ALL?
Aside from all the usual frisbee/coaster options… er, not really. Give it to someone you don't like very much, perhaps?

games™

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

NOTHING: That's right… not one feature of this game can be said to be 'unique'. Blending every platform cliché in the book, *Vexx* is the most derivative waste of time we've seen in ages.

This is the hub and believe us you'll see enough of it – for some reason, you're taken back to it every time you collect a Wraithheart.

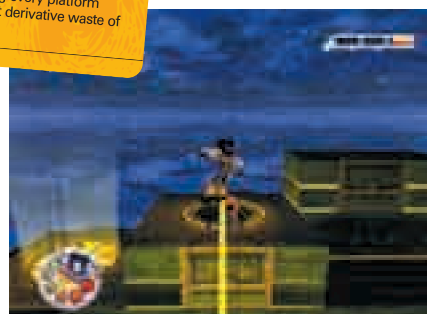
often enough), you'll just laugh at his misfortune and it's often more enjoyable to make Vexx jump into a fire than it is collecting all the pointless junk that litters the levels. Better still are the rhyming clues intended to point you in the direction of the all-important Wraithhearts in each area – most of these read like the ramblings of a drunken fool and are more likely to make you throw things than to inspire you to track down the item in question.

Unfortunately for our eyes, the only version available for review was the PlayStation2 game but glimpses of the two other versions revealed no improvements bar some slightly polished aesthetics. Even with the dreadful loading times, textures and models – which resemble a PSone game running through the enhancements offered by the second PlayStation – the frame rate still has trouble remaining stable. As the camera swings (and believe us it does, whether you want it to or not), the action judders and slows down in an embarrassing fashion. Did we mention the regular glitching though objects? Poor collision detection? Woeful attempts at lighting? All in all, *Vexx* is hands down one of the worst-looking PS2 games we've seen for a while. Comparisons have been drawn to the mighty *Turok Evolution* in this respect. The same team was to blame for that atrocity and such is evident from an apparent re-use of textures and a general stench that brings back horrible memories of chasing dinosaur people round in circles.

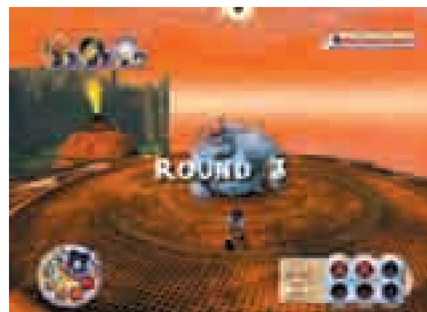
But what's this? A positive point? Sort of – more a double-edged sword, really. There's a lot to collect in *Vexx* but, as we pointed out, this is both good and not so good. Although there's a wealth of collectibles out there, chances are you'll tire of them long before you come close to finding them all. Better still, should Vexx kick the bucket during the course of a level (which happens all too often thanks to awful controls and camera work), everything is lost and you're placed back at the start of the area. The only items it'll allow you to keep are the Wraithhearts, but most of these will require at least one leap of faith en route which, thanks to one of the worst cameras in recent memory, often results in a one-way trip to the start of the level. Joy.

This genre is now well-trodden territory, with *Jak And Daxter*, *Ratchet & Clank*, *Haven* and even the trusty *Rayman* gracing the PS2 with varying degrees of success. It's got to the point where a generic platform game needs to be something pretty damn special to get the attention of the games-buying public – this is as generic as they come and just as poor. We're sure *Vexx* will find a few fans, but then several people also claimed to like *Turok Evolution* (this must just have been a tasteless and ill-conceived publicity stunt or something). Either way, *Vexx* offers nothing big, nothing clever, nothing new and certainly nothing to warrant parting with your hard-earned cash. In all honesty, the official press release says it better than we ever could: "Vexx underscores the vision and commitment of Acclaim." Yes… yes it does.

VERDICT 2/10
ALMOST UTTERLY WITHOUT MERIT – A DISGRACE

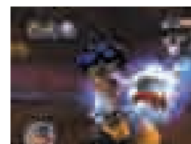


Vexx balances precariously atop a tall pole. Don't fall. little fellow, you might do yourself an injury.



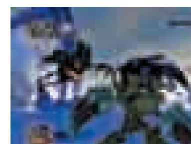
Look at the fat sumo thing, isn't it funny? Er, no, actually. Try again, Acclaim, and remember – boss battles need some kind of structure.

GAMECUBE £39.99 OUT NOW

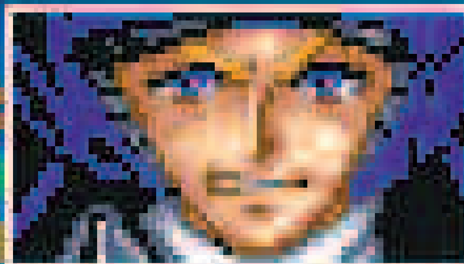


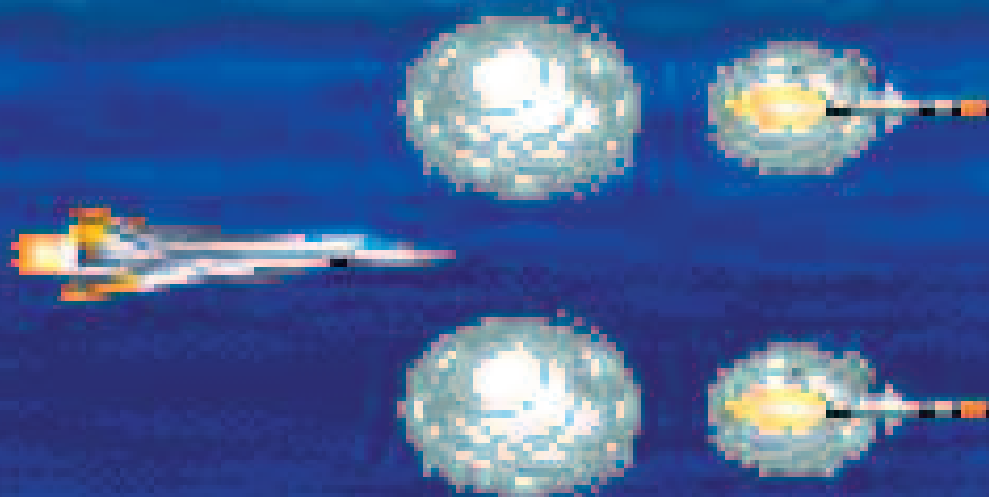
The visuals are slightly less offensive than those of the PS2 version, but the game is equally appalling. All the horrible flaws remain but just with a touch more polish.

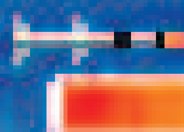
XBOX £39.99 OUT NOW



The Xbox version looks almost how the PlayStation2 version should look – we even spotted something that resembled textures. Shame the game's so awful, really…







Come fly with me, let's fly, let's fly away… **UN Squadron SNES [Capcom] 1991**


2 PLAYER
PUSHBUTTON


eMag

RETRO

MICRO GAMES ACTION

A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.4 MARCH 2003
00p

THE BITMAP BROTHERS

We speak to the legendary creators of Speedball II and Chaos Engine

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

Who's on the spiky family tree?

THIS MONTH IN 1987

Games that are Always On My Mind

CLASSIC MAGAZINES

From Zero to hero!

COIN-OP R.I.P.?

HAVE WE SEEN THE DEMISE OF THE ARCADE?

PLUS! Win a JAMMA arcade machine for your bedroom!

EXTRA! EXTRA!

SUPER NINTENDO

TETRIS BATTLE GAIDEN

MONTHLY RETRO GAMES REVIEW

FINAL FIGHT

Lady-boys in gaming shcoker!

PLUS... GAME ADS OF YESTERYEAR!

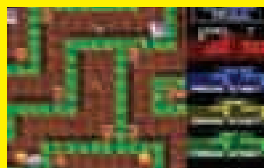
Retro

This Month In 1987

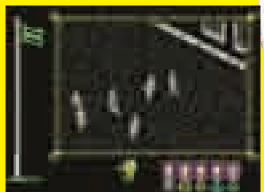
It was a time when Jeffrey Archer decided to engage in a spot of fibbing, Nigel Lawson was trying to help win the Tory vote and the NES was something that you plugged a robot into. These were strange times indeed but they were also the beginning of the end…

SPECTRUM TOP TEN BY GALLUP

1: **Gauntlet** (US Gold)
2: **Olli and Lissa** (Firebird)
3: **Super Soccer** (Imagine)
4: **Trivial Pursuit** (Domark)
5: **Cobra** (Ocean)
6: **The Great Escape** (Ocean)
7: **Computer Hits Vol 3** (Beau Jolly)
8: **Footballer of the Year** (Firebird)
9: **Paperboy** (Elite)
10: **Speed King 2** (Mastertronic)



Gauntlet proved to be a cross-platform favourite and topped the Spectrum chart.



Dig for victory and show some good British pluck in *The Great Escape*.

UK CHARTS FOR MAR 1987

1: Everything I Own
Boy George
2: I Get The Sweetest Feeling
Jackie Wilson
3: Live It Up
Mental As Anything
4: The Great Pretender
Freddie Mercury
5: Stand By Me
Ben E. King
6: Respectable
Mel & Kim
7: When A Man Loves A Woman
Percy Sledge
8: Crush On You
Jets
9: Male Stripper
Man 2 Man Meet Man Parrish
10: Running In The Family
Level 42

WORLD NEWS

Tragedy struck this month when the Herald of Free Enterprise sank. The ferry had left the port of Zeebrugge in Belgium heading for Dover when it suddenly rolled over killing some 200 people. The cause of the disaster was later revealed to have been a failure to close the bow doors.

Not quite record-breaking but speedy enough to win the Tory vote was the budget speech by the then Chancellor, Nigel Lawson. Disraeli once bolted through his in a mere 45 of your earth minutes but Nigel was no slouch coming in at a brisk 59 minutes. The Chancellor wasted no time in cutting the basic rate of corporation tax by 2% – with an election just three months away, Neil Kinnock (appropriately red-headed Labour leader) regarded this as a 'bribes budget'. No, really?



GAMING NEWS MARCH '87

IT'S ONLY A COMPUTER, REALLY IT IS…

March was something of an exciting month back in the days when Jeffrey Archer was busily telling porkies in a libel case (something that he would later regret. Remember folks: it's better to lose £500,000 and admit to lewd acts with a prostitute than spend time in prison).

For starters, Spectrum fans were horrified to learn that Alan Sugar was once more going to pervert the Spectrum brand with the abomination that was the Sinclair Spectrum 128K +3. It was clear that Amstrad were more interested in the brand 'Sinclair Spectrum' than the heritage of the original Spectrums. This time, Amstrad did a '6128' on the popular machine, adding a built-in disk drive to the computer rather than the Datasette on the +2. We're not sure what he was thinking of, either.

Whilst Mr. Sugar was busily looking to the past, gamers, on the other hand, were looking very much to the future and it seemed clear that lasers and robots were going to feature very prominently over the coming years. Journos who made their weary way to the Earl's Court Toy Fair found themselves confronted by laser-gun games aplenty from the likes of Ban Dai, Action GT and (bless) Matchbox. However, it was the robots that took centre stage – even to the point where the 'computer' that one was attached to (a NES) was barely regarded by gaming press.

How little they knew of what was to come, but R.O.B (Robotic Operating Buddy) seems to have acted like something of a Trojan horse for Nintendo.

The beginning of the end of home computers as the dominant platform for gaming had begun, and no-one even noticed…



People were amazed by R.O.B., but his charms would soon wane and gamers would learn to love the 'computer' it was attached to.

SIX OF THE BEST

Here are some of the gaming gems that you might have been playing back in March 1987. Though there were a few stinkers, gamers were treated to some damn fine home conversions of some great arcade classics – you lucky blighters.

SPACE HARRIER

Format: **Various home systems**
Publisher: **Elite**

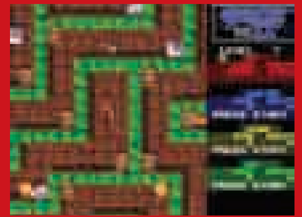
As with a lot of games at this time, *Space Harrier* was released to satisfy the needs of gamers who had shoved many a coin into its arcade counterpart. Thankfully, the home conversion replicated the pace and action to a tee and while it might not have been quite as pretty, this version was something rather special.



GAUNTLET

Format: **Various home systems**
Publisher: **Midway**

Thanks to a staggered release over the different home systems, *Gauntlet* proved a popular and worthy port of the arcade classic. Certainly it lacked the four-player loveliness of its bigger brother but the gameplay and the sheer difficulty of the later levels meant that this remained a perennial favourite.



TEMPEST

Format: **Spectrum**
Publisher: **Electric Dreams**

The classic Jeff Minter title was rolled out onto the Spectrum and, unlike subsequent versions, this one sucked. The limitations of the machine coupled with high expectations meant that reviews of this were not too favourable. However, if you fancied a spot of mindless blasting, this was the game to keep you occupied.



STARGLIDER

Format: **Various home systems**
Publisher: **Rainbird**

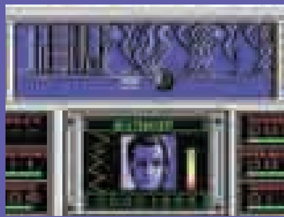
Having impressed on more powerful machines, somehow *Starglider* was shoehorned onto the less capable platforms such as the C-64, Spectrum and Amstrad. Though a little stripped down, the atmosphere and addictive play remained, much to the delight of a new generation of gamers.



ALIENS

Format: **Various Home Systems**
Publisher: **Electric Dreams**

It's good to see that then, as now, videogames based on movies were cack. Here some very stolid gameplay and uninspiring graphics merged to create an astonishingly tedious gamesplaying experience. Apparently it was supposed to engender the atmosphere of the movie. Electric Dreams? More like a nightmare…



PAPERBOY

Format: **Various home systems**
Publisher: **Elite**

Another Midway game and another winning home conversion of a killer arcade game. Though this had been released before Christmas, delivering The Daily Sun was still proving irresistible to many. If you were playing games by then there's a good chance that your Datasette was busily loading this great game.



LAST MONTH'S COMMODORE 64 SCREENSHOTS REVEALED

If last month's screenshots had you scratching your head then rest easy as here, for you, is the complete list. Aren't we lovely?

FIRST ROW
Attack of the Mutant Camels
Back to the Future 2
Ballblazer
Bangkok Knights
Barbarian
Barbarian II
Barry McGuigan Boxing
Basket Master
Batalyx
Bazooka Bill

SECOND ROW
Bruce Lee
Break Dance (Tape Version)
Boulder Dash
Bop'n Wrestle
Blagger
Blade Runner
Bionic Commando
Biggles
Beach Head II
BC's Quest for Tires

THIRD ROW
Buggy Boy
By Fair Means or Foul
California Games
Creatures
Decathlon
Deceptor
Deep Strike
Delta
Dizzy Panic
Double Take

FOURTH ROW
Gribblys Day Out
The Great Giana Sisters
Exile
Entombed
Encounter
Eidolon
Eddie Kidd Jump Challenge
E-Motion
Dropzone
Dragon's Lair

FIFTH ROW
Grog's Revenge
Hacker
Hardball
Hawkeye
Hunchback II: Quasimodo's Revenge
Hypaball
H.A.T.E
I-Ball
Imhotep
Impossible Mission

SIXTH ROW
Pitstop II
Pitfall
Pirates!
Ping Pong
Park Patrol
Paratroopers
Parallax
Paradroid
Pac-Mania
Pac-Land

SEVENTH ROW
Platoon
Power Drift
Predator
Sanxion
Summer Games
Super Pipeline
Tapper
Target Renegade
Test Drive
Thing On A Spring

EIGHTH ROW
William Wobbler
Wheel Soccer
Wheelin' Wallie
Westbank
WEC Le Mans
Way of the Exploding Fist
Samurai Warrior: The Battles of Usagi Yojimbo
Uridium
Up 'n Down
Thundercats

Retro

Classic Machine

SUPER NINTENDO
ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

"WHY I LOVED MY SNES"

The SNES isn't so much like your first girlfriend, but it was definitely the first girl to let you put your hand up her jumper. You knew Nintendo made great games – it had proven that with the brick-like NES, but this time they made games that took over your life. Out were the basic sprites and in was pseudo-3D gaming (thanks to Mode 7) prompting countless 'My one's better than your one!' arguments up and down the country. The SNES was the Escort XR3i to the Mega Drive's Capri: the Capri was there first, but the XR3i was more go and less show.

Steve Takle
***Editor,* PLAY**

PROBABLY THE GREATEST CONSOLE IN THE WORLD… EVER

For many, the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (or SNES to its chums) was, and remains, the best games console ever released – the successor to the NES and direct combatant of the 16-bit wonder, the Mega Drive.

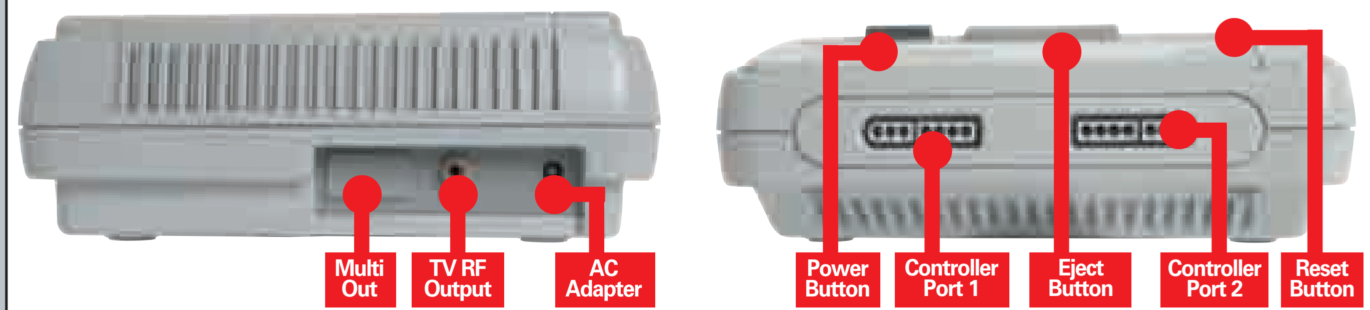
Launched in Japan on 21 November 1990 (it hit the US in September 1991 and Europe in April 1992) along with the highly anticipated *Super Mario World* and *F-Zero* (another classic in the making). In Japan alone, demand for the new console rose to near fever pitch – so much so that Nintendo had to deliver the shipments of consoles at night for fear that the rumours that yakuza gangs might hijack the lorries to sell the consoles on the black market would prove true.

Though the SNES was, by anyone's standards, incredibly successful, it was nowhere near as popular as the NES, which sold upwards of 50 million units in the US alone. The reason for this was twofold: on one hand, the success of the NES meant that gamers were reluctant to give up their old console for the SNES (exacerbated by the fact that Nintendo had decided that it would be too expensive to make the SNES backwardly compatible with NES cartridges). This along with some pretty stiff competition from the Mega Drive ensured that sales, whilst good, were unimpressive when compared to those of its predecessor.

Nevertheless, the SNES is an enduring favourite due to the sheer variety and quantity of games available. Whatever your gaming predilections you could be sure that Nintendo's gaming delight had it covered. The list is endless, but it's hard not to go all moist-eyed at the fond memories of such games as *Secret Of Mana, Street Fighter II Turbo, Contra III, R-Type III, Darius Twin, StarFox, Pilot Wings, Super Bomberman, Super Castlevania* and countless others. What's more, all of the above and the hundreds we have omitted are every bit as playable today as they were then.

The design of the console (certainly the European and Japanese models) is elegant and the joypad is still functional, if a little basic when compared with the sleeker Mega Drive pad. But of all the retro videogames systems, this is the one that any self-respecting gamer simply has to have.

AROUND THE BACK…



SUPER METROID

Super Metroid places you once more in control of Samus, who has taken the last living Metroid hatchling to the Ceres Base to allow scientists to study it and harness its powers for the benefit of mankind. Naturally, things don't go to plan and upon receiving a distress call from said base Samus has to hot-foot it back to find an escaped Metroid, lots of dead scientists and, of course, Mother Brain in robot form up to no good. Brilliant gameplay fused with some atmospheric visuals and sound effects ensured that this game went down in history as being more than a bit good.





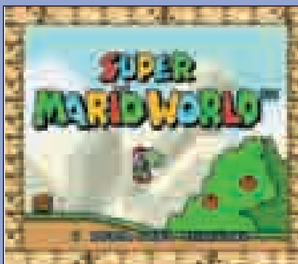
KEY GAMES

Picking great games that appeared on the SNES is like shooting fish in a packed-to-capacity barrel. Choosing everyone's favourites is quite another matter…



SUPER MARIO WORLD

Until recently, you simply couldn't launch a Nintendo console without a *Mario* title and the SNES was home to a corker. Considering that the Mega Drive was already very successful (due to being launched the previous year), *Super Mario World* had to be the kind of killer app that would draw gamers back to the Nintendo fold. Thankfully, Miyamoto delivered one of the most satisfying gaming experiences to date. Although it drew heavily from its predecessors, the marriage of the gaming elements along with finally giving Mario a cape (confirming the plumber as the superhero that we knew him to be) proved to be one of the most satisfying *Mario* titles to date.



The finest *Mario* game to date? We reckon. And while you may disagree, you're clearly wrong.

SUPER MARIO KART

This game was responsible for blistered thumbs the world over and doubtless many premature deaths of SNES pads. *Super Mario Kart* was a racing game that pitted you against all your favourite characters with added Nintendo fun. Of course, racing as Mario, Luigi et al was the hook but it was the combination of power-ups, precision control and, most importantly of all, the two-player game that proved irresistible to gamers. In fact, many of those who have enjoyed *Mario Kart* maintain that it is the superlative instalment of the series and we wait with limbs and appendages crossed in the hope that the soon-to-be-announced GameCube version eclipses the granddaddy of them all…



Proof that you don't need a fancy coin-op cabinet to make the best racing game ever.

IT COULD HAVE BEEN SO DIFFERENT…

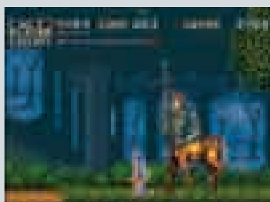
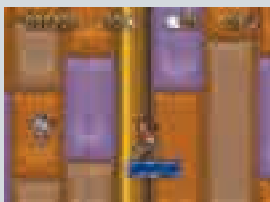
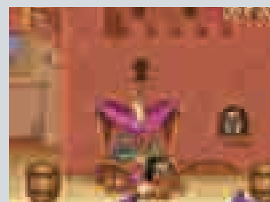
In a peculiar twist of fate, it was Nintendo that was partly responsible for bringing Sony into the world of videogames. From 1988 onwards, Nintendo courted the skills of Sony regarding a disc-based add-on for the SNES. Over the years, Nintendo flitted from Sony to Philips and back again until deciding to dispense with the idea altogether, due possibly to concerns regarding piracy (always a major concern for Nintendo, particularly N64 and GameCube) and the dismal performance of the Mega CD.

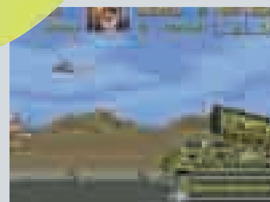
Thanks to this dalliance, Sony, clearly not wishing to waste the time and resources spent developing the add-on, went on to develop something called the PlayStation. At a time when Nintendo had something like a 70 per cent share of the videogames market, some wondered whether Sony could challenge the combined might of Nintendo and SEGA. Little did they know…

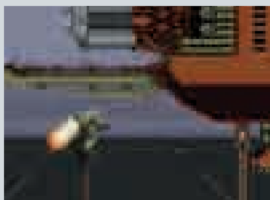
Nintendo

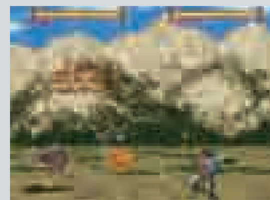
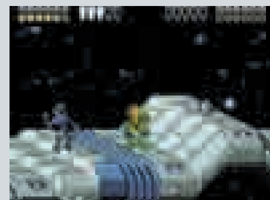
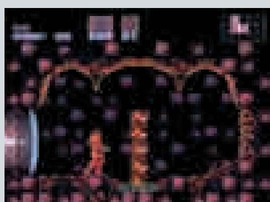
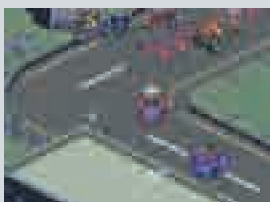
SUPER NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

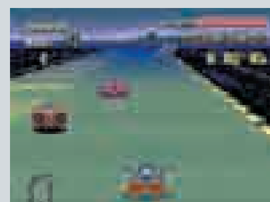
Classic Machine

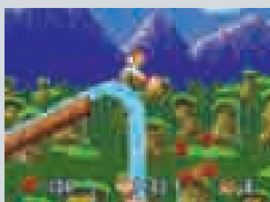
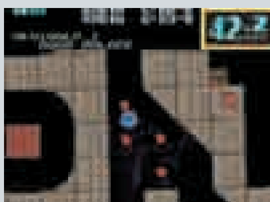




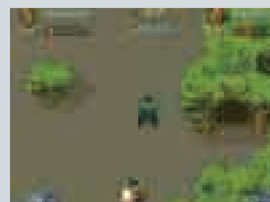


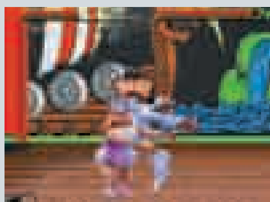


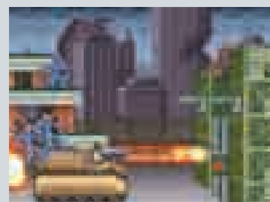
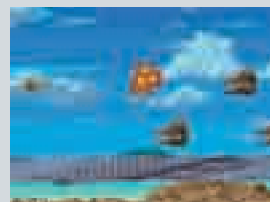
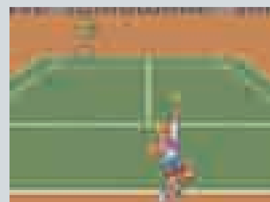
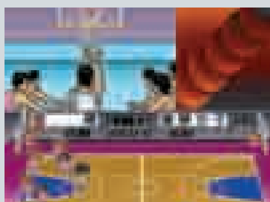
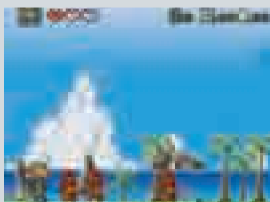
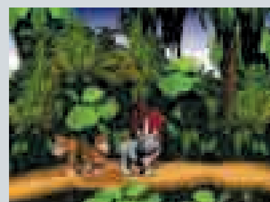
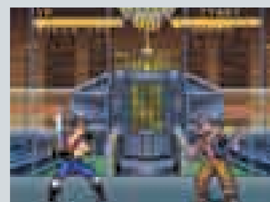
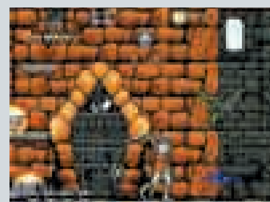
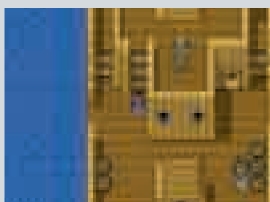
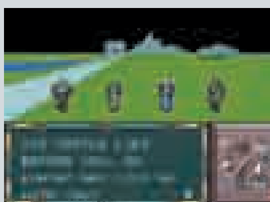
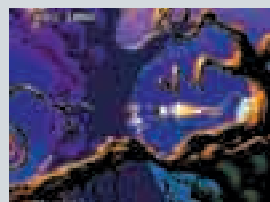
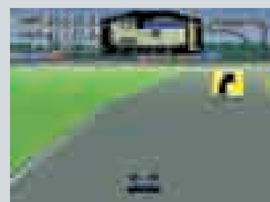
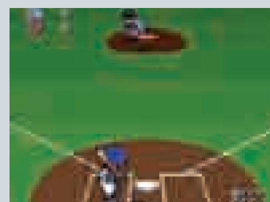





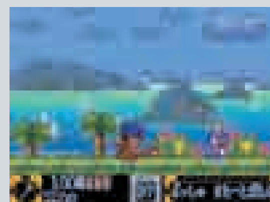





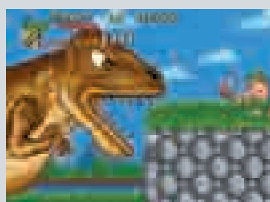


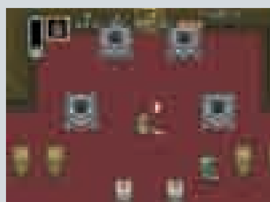














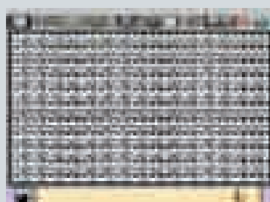


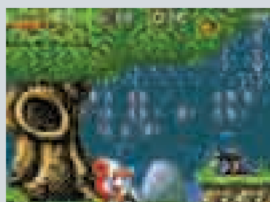



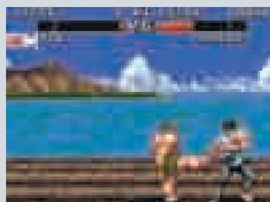
POWER

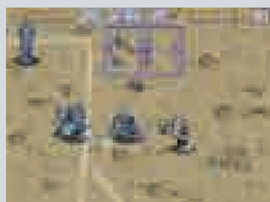


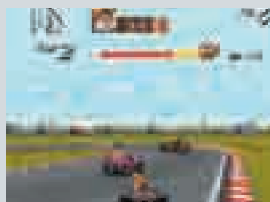
















CLASSIC MAGAZINES

The first issue may have had *Tintin On The Moon* on the cover, but that didn't stop *ZERO* from becoming a well-loved multiformat mag in its day.

ZERO

ZERO was a multiformat title that shared marked similarities with *Your Sinclair*, most notably in terms of its informative but comical editorial style (unsurprising given that a number of ex-*YS* staff worked on it).

To begin with the magazine covered the 16-bit home computers with a fairly small dash of console coverage for good measure, although in later issues this balance would change to reflect the increasing popularity of consoles. This quote taken from the Yikes! section of issue one should give you a rough idea of what the mag was like: "Every month, Yikes! interviews a "famous person" on the telephone. We were thinking of doing one with Tommy Cooper, but as he died about four years ago we did one with Jeremy Beadle instead…". A bunch of other quirky sections and characters such as The Black Shape are also fondly remembered. The way games were reviewed on each available format was a nice touch too.

Sadly, *ZERO* didn't it make it to the 32-bit era and is much-missed. But can anyone tell us what David McCandless is up to now? The picture of him they used in the magazine was priceless.

DON'T GO CHANGING

Back in the early Nineties, firms like SEGA and Nintendo (particularly) were still somewhat touchy about the manner in which the fairer sex were being depicted in games. We take a look at some of the bizarre changes the US branches of the two companies inflicted on the home conversions of Capcom's *Final Fight*.



Oh, whilst we're on the subject, Poison and Roxy were not (as has mistakenly been reported elsewhere) transvestites, as this little piece of artwork surely proves, or does it?

FINAL FIGHT

It's remarkable how attitudes can change so quickly, a case in point being the depiction of women in games. Twenty years ago, women in videogames were mostly there to be rescued by men, whether it be by a hunky kung-fu master or a knight in shining armour. In the new millennium all that has changed, with games like *Dead Or Alive*, *Tomb Raider* and *Ready 2 Rumble Boxing* featuring strong female characters who are at least equal in ability to their male counterparts.

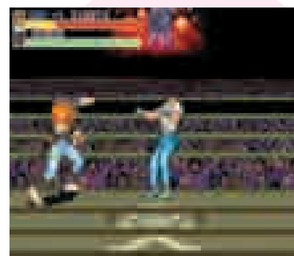
However, reaching this point wasn't a smooth ride and even in the Nineties certain videogame firms still weren't entirely comfortable with the virtual female form. A fine example of the unease about female characters is the treatment of Capcom's home conversions of *Final Fight* in the good old US of A. When the game appeared on the SNES in the US it was missing, among other things, a whole level and one of the selectable characters – granted, these omissions were more than likely down to the small size of the game's cart. Less explainable though was the disappearance of the two sleazy female street punks Poison and Roxy, who were replaced with two 'nice' characters called Billy and Sid.

So on their journey to the States the two ladies had undergone a small operation and were now, er, men. Seemingly somebody at Nintendo Of America didn't like the idea of beating up women (scantily clad women at that) so out with the gals it was. A couple of other alterations were also made to protect the naïve minds of young Americans: the names of the first and second level bosses (Damnd and Sodom) were changed to Thrasher and Katana respectively (talk about over-protective).

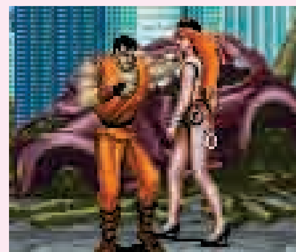
SEGA were also at it though, and in the US Mega CD version of *Final Fight* (probably the best home conversion of the game) Poison and Roxy fell foul of the censors once again. It wasn't quite so drastic this time round and the pair remained women, although their clothing had been altered so they were showing off less flesh. Of course, in these days of *Dead Or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* few people would bat an eyelid at a bit of skin, but back then the powers that be obviously thought we weren't ready for such filth.



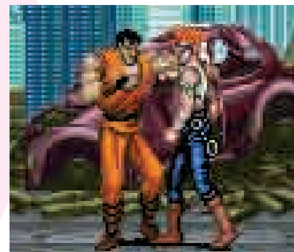
Look at the Japanese Mega CD version of Poison (left). Then in come the self-appointed guardians of morality at SEGA USA with a new top for the poor young lady (right).



Nintendo Of America changed the name of Sodom (pictured) to Katana. The name of the first level boss, Damnd, was switched to Thrasher. WHY?



Take a look at the foxy Roxy (sorry) in the Super Famicom version of *Final Fight*. Pretty little thing, isn't she?



Clearly somebody felt that punching women was un-American, hence Roxy (and Poison) were replaced with Sid and Billy in the US version.

THE GAME OF A LIFETIME*



Available for Commodore 64, Spectrum 48K and Spectrum +. Coming soon: Amstrad and MSX.



GOLD EDITION

ELITE (Spectrum 48K/+, C64, Amstrad, MSX) Advert first appeared in *Crash* magazine, February 1986

THE GREAT GA[ME]
COIN-OP

Is your brain a stockpile of useless gaming information? Do you know more about old arcade games than you do about your own family? Excellent – just what we're looking for. You see, we've got this 26-inch screen, two-player, JAMMA-compatible arcade cabinet (complete with a copy of *Soul Edge* to play on it) that we really want to give away. Just imagine this beast tucked in the corner of your bedroom/ lavatory/aviary etc. But how will we know it will go to 'the one'? Here's how. Just answer these painfully easy retro-arcade questions and fill in the tie-breaker. First one out of our communal hat wins. And we will accept alternative game/ character names (those used in different territories) where applicable. Good luck.

ARE YOU TOUGH ENOUGH FOR THE MOTHER OF ALL COIN-OP QUIZZES? IT'S HARDER THAN THE HARDEST GAME EVER

QUESTIONS

1: What was the name of Thomas's lovely girlfriend in *Kung-Fu Master*?

2: On the subject of *Kung-Fu Master*, what name did the game go by in its native territory of Japan?

3: Who programmed the code responsible for making the volcano in *Battle Zone* erupt?

4: Name each of the boss characters from the original coin-op version of *Final Fight*.

5: In 1986 Capcom released *Tatakai No Banka*. What name did the game go by in the West?

6: What was the name of the hero's dog in SEGA's 1989 coin-op *Shadow Dancer*? (Clue: it wasn't Shep)

7: What were the names of the two central characters in Taito's 1988 coin-op *Operation Thunderbolt*?

8: In the original *Street Fighter* coin-op, what was the name of the first fighter you encountered in China?

9: What happened if you scored three consecutive perfects in the skeet-shooting stage of Konami's *Hyper Sports*?

10: What was the first level of *Space Harrier* called?

11: The name of the guardian in the fourth level of coin-op *Shinobi* was…?

12: In *Super Street Fighter II*, the character Dee Jay was originally intended to have the word Mantis written down the side of his trousers. Why was this later changed to Maximum?

13: Which popular Namco coin-op featured a central character called Rick?

14: What was the third game in the *Chase H.Q.* series called?

15: In the attract sequence of the original *Street Fighter* a young man is seen punching through a wall. Names the titles of the Capcom games which have been spray-painted onto the wall.

16: This is the story of Bull and Pip, a pair of frogs on a wonderful trip. In search of food they wander about… what line of text comes next in this tune? (Clue: it rhymes)

THE PRIZE



Ever dreamt of owning your very own coin-op? Well, thanks to the lovely people at Arcade Warehouse you could win yourself a beautiful 26-inch screen, two-player JAMMA compatible cabinet, complete with Namco's *Soul Edge* to play on it.

Remember, the beauty of the JAMMA system is that you can buy other JAMMA compatible PCBs which will work with the machine.

What a prize – a lifetime's gaming satisfaction all for answering a few questions…

ARCADE WAREHOUSE

Website: www.arcadewarehouse.com **Telephone:** 01977 668566

Arcade Warehouse is one of the biggest dealers of arcade machines in the UK and carries a huge amount of stock including classic video arcade games, pinball machines, fruit machines and spare parts. Put simply, if you've always hankered after a real arcade cabinet then this really should be your first port of call.

Arcade Warehouse's mission is to keep old games going. The firm trades modern machines such as *SEGA Rally*, *Silent Scope* and *Star Wars Trilogy*, but its heart is with the old classics. The business has been running for six years and has over 300 machines in stock – ranging from *Paperboy* to *Playboy Pinball*. The firm also stocks a healthy variety of pinball machines, CD jukeboxes, quiz machines, driving games, shooters, air hockey, pool and football tables. Basically, everything you'd find in a quality arcade. Dance machines are also becoming increasingly affordable and can be purchased from the company.

However, old favourites like *Defender*, *Asteroids*, *Galaxians*, *Galaga* and *1942* are at the core of the trade. Credit cards are accepted and a door-to-door delivery service is also available. Check out their Web site or give them a ring, as stock changes regularly.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

The editor's decision is final. No correspondence will be entered into. Employees of Paragon Publishing Ltd and Arcade Warehouse Ltd may not enter the competition. We reserve the right to issue a prize of equivalent value to those illustrated if necessary. Closing date for entries is 23 April 2003.

MES™ QUIZ

17: The coin-op *Boogie Wings* is also known by another name, which is…?

18: Which side-scrolling beat-'em-up included a cameo appearance (as a boss) by Data East's Karnov?

19: What was the title of the first laserdisc videogame to be released in Japan?

20: What was the codename of the secret agent you controlled in *Rolling Thunder*?

21: What was the name of the ninja in *Captain Commando*?

22: Name the paper you were delivering in Atari's *Paperboy*.

23: Who was the sweet young lady who explained your missions and gave you advice in *Chase H.Q.*?

24: In *Donkey Kong*, Mario was called something else. What was it?

25: Staying with *Donkey Kong*, what was the profession of the character you played as? (Clue: it wasn't a plumber)

26: In *Vendetta*, what was the name of the gang you were fighting against?

27: Name the follicularly challenged boss of level one in *Smash TV*.

28: In *Asteroids*, what name was given to the tactic of leaving just one rock on screen and then picking off flying saucers for big bonus points?

29: In the arcade version of *Out Run*, what was the frequency displayed when selecting the tune *Magical Sound Shower*?

30: At the beginning of the coin-op version of *Golden Axe*, players encountered a wounded friend. What was his name?

31: What was the name of the boss on level one of *Sunset Riders*? (Yes, we will accept both variants, we're nice like that)

32: Name the four selectable characters in *Dead Connection*.

33: What was written on the bottom of Mike Haggar's television set in the introduction sequence of *Final Fight*?

34: According to his profile in *Final Fight*, what is Cody's date of birth?

35: What colours were the headbands of the two heroes in *Ikari Warriors*?

36: Name the terrorist organisation you were fighting against in *Shinobi*.

37: What was the name of the girl abducted in the opening sequence of *Double Dragon*?

38: What kind of weapon do you begin with in *Green Beret*?

39: In *Gauntlet*, what happened if you stood motionless while 30 of your health points ticked away?

40: What was the name of the tune that played during the high score sequence of *Out Run*?

Dingdingding! Bonus Question: Which animal would you most associate with the Japanese firm Capcom? (Clue: it appeared in many of the company's earlier releases).

PICTURE QUESTIONS



1. In which game did this character appear?



2. Name this game?



3. In which game did this lady appear?



4. Name this early videogame nasty?



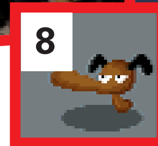
5. Who was the central hero of this Data East coin-op?



6. The title of this game is?



7. This was the final boss of which game?



8. In which game would you expect to meet this enemy?



9. This is the part of the intro sequence from which title?



10. What is the title of this game?

TIE-BREAKER QUESTION

In the event of a tie-break situation the winner will be decided based on their response (no more than ten words, please) to the statement below:
I am proud to have squandered my life filling my mind with useless retro videogame knowledge that will in no way benefit myself or, indeed, society when I could have instead been doing something more useful such as reading a book, vandalising a telephone box or mugging old ladies, because…

HOW TO ENTER

If you think you know the answers then jot them down on some paper (toilet roll will do) or a postcard and send them to: Hotdog? What Hotdog? Competition, games™, Paragon Publishing Ltd, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 2JS. If your entry gets pulled out of the games™ biscuit barrel then you're the winner. Sadly, that will render everyone else a "two-time loser".

Retro

CLASSIC CONSOLES BUYERS GUIDE

I'D BUY THAT FOR A DOLLAR

This is a basic list of the sort of prices you can expect to pay for the more popular retro gaming systems. Obviously, these can vary wildly but these prices are intended to be a rough guideline so you can tell if you're getting a bargain or being unscrupulously fleeced.

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£20
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£50

ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£35 (the original model costs less)
Atari Jaguar	£25

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (varies according to model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (varies according to model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35

MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£200-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (varies according to model)

NEC

PC Engine	£70-80
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£100-150
PC Engine GT	£150-200
Super Grafx	£200-250

NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£15-50 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-25
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20
Mega Drive	£20-25
Game Gear	£35-40
Mega CD	£40-60
SEGA 32X	£30
SEGA Nomad	£75-100
SEGA Saturn	£30
Dreamcast	£25-30

SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

Neo Geo MVS Single Slot (Arcade system)	£70 (prices for multi-slots are higher)
Neo Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo Geo CD	£125-175
Neo Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo Geo Pocket Color	£40-50

SYSTEMS

NINTENDO ENTERTA



RECOMMENDED PRICE:
£15-20 (without games)

Despite enjoying incredible success in the US and its native Japan (where it was known as the Famicom), Nintendo's 8-bit system never quite caught on over here. In some ways it arrived in the UK a little too late – the machine first went on sale in Japan in 1983, roughly three years earlier than in the UK. Making matters worse was the fact that when it did arrive here, many of the launch titles on offer were beginning

SEGA MASTER S



RECOMMENDED PRICE:
£15-20

In the rest of the world, the Master System played second fiddle to the NES, but here in Blighty we took the machine to our hearts. Technically the system was more powerful than its Nintendo rival and the 8-bit console played host to a slew of SEGA arcade conversions (most of which were far from perfect). However, the Master System also enjoyed some great RPGs including the earlier instalments of the highly regarded *Phantasy Star* series. Some excellent third-party releases bolstered

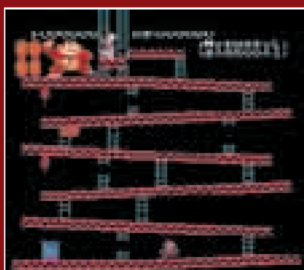
UP CLOSE!

This month we examine the 8-bit Nintendo Entertainment System and its SEGA rival, the Master System. We also look at the Atari 520ST, the bitter rival of the Amiga for the home computer market of the late Eighties.

INMENT SYSTEM

to show their age. Eventually, the machine did sell in decent amounts in the UK.

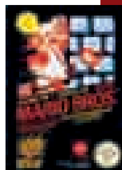
Despite the machine's age, it can still be picked up for next to nothing in the second-hand sections of most good independent stores. Shop around and you should be able to pick up a system complete with a few games for around £20-25. Admittedly, many of the games lack the depth and polish of their SNES counterparts, but it's still a machine well worth adding to your collection, especially if you find one going cheap.



The timeless *Donkey Kong* can be yours once you've embraced the power of the NES.

FIVE RECOMMENDED GAMES

- Mario Bros.
- Super Mario Bros.
- Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link
- Kid Icarus
- Castlevania II: Simon's Quest



SOFTWARE

A hugely diverse range of software was released for the NES – many of the best titles came from the Nintendo stable, with games such as *Mario Bros.* and *Metroid* still standing up against today's efforts. Prices vary, but you can probably expect to pay between £5-10.

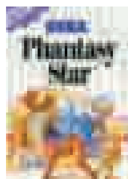
WHERE TO LOOK

The machine can still often been seen in stores such as Cash Converters, GameStation and, for that matter, any good second-hand videogame store. Then, as if we even need to say it, there's good old eBay – the site where dreams can come true.

YSTEM

FIVE RECOMMENDED GAMES

- Zillion
- Phantasy Star
- Alex Kidd In Miracle World
- Fantasy Zone
- Wonder Boy In Monster Land



the machine's software line-up.

A number of peripherals were released for the machine, including a lightgun and some tragic 3D glasses. Software initially came on two storage mediums – cartridges and cards, the latter of which soon disappeared as developers couldn't store much data on them. Few would describe the Master System as a classic console, but for the legions of SEGA fans still out there, owning the machine is a necessity.



Earlier releases such as *Black Belt* were simplistic affairs, but strangely enjoyable.

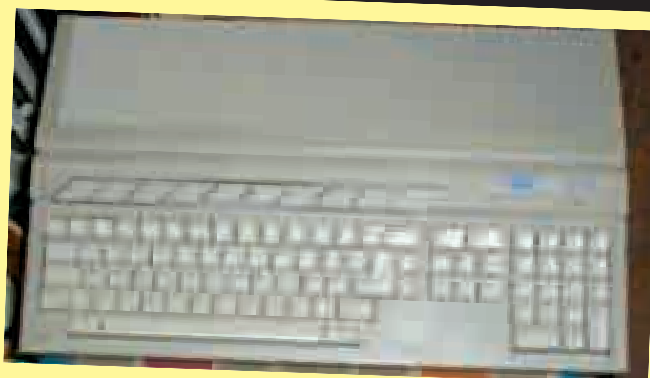
WHERE TO LOOK

Picking up a Master System shouldn't really be a problem. You still find them second-hand in good independent stores, and a quick call to some of the retailers advertised in the back of this mag should get results. And (wait for it) you can find tons of Master Systems on the ever-reliable eBay.

SOFTWARE

A varied range of software is available for the Master System encompassing almost every genre you could imagine. Whilst they may not have been up there with the *Marios* and *Sonics* of this world, the *Alex Kidd* games are enjoyable and well worth checking out. The good news is that most Master System games can be picked up for £5-10, so you should be able to compile a good collection for a small sum.

ATARI 520ST



RECOMMENDED PRICE:
£40 (with software)

Despite enjoying a good degree of popularity, the Atari ST was, in the eyes of gamers at least, a poor man's Amiga. To be fair, the machine did have trouble with smooth scrolling (especially the horizontal variety) and its sound chip paled in comparison to that of the Amiga. However, the Atari 520ST (plenty of variant models are available) was, and still is, a fine machine, playing host to some truly wonderful software. Even today the computer is still popular among musicians due to its built-in MIDI capabilities.

The machine's popularity means it's quite easy to pick up one of the many models, although the standard Atari 520ST is the most common. Many Amiga owners mocked Atari's 16-bit home computer, but the truth was the vast majority of Amiga games were simply ports of the ST version. Granted, if you're purely interested in games then the Amiga versions tended to be superior (better music, for instance), but that doesn't mean you shouldn't sample the delights of the ST. If you're interested in learning more about the machine then head to the fantastic Atari ST website The Little Green Desktop at www.atari.st.

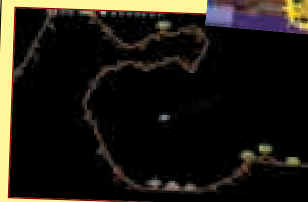


The sheer depth and subtlety of *Dungeon Master* still manages to impress today.

FIVE RECOMMENDED GAMES

- Dungeon Master
- Oids
- Rick Dangerous
- Stunt Car Racer
- Carrier Command





Despite being a superb game, *Oids* never enjoyed the commercial success it so richly deserved. If you find a copy for sale snap it up.

SOFTWARE

Commercial software (and lots of public domain stuff) can easily be acquired. There's a wealth of different titles to choose ranging from coin-op conversions to more subtle titles like Faster Than Light's superb *Dungeon Master* (you really must play this game to appreciate how good it is). Then, of course, you've got classics like *Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe* and Geoff Crammond's timeless *Stunt Car Racer*. Better still, in most instances you can pick these beauties up for couple of quid.

WHERE TO LOOK

Car boot sales and eBay are your best bet here. In both instances you should be able to pick up a machine and a decent selection of software for somewhere in the region of £40. Also, the machine's standard joystick ports mean that you can use Mega Drive pads as controllers, in case you find yourself stuck with a dodgy joystick.

V

The T.V. science fiction series invades your home computer.

Earth is visited by seemingly human aliens...
These reptiles soon reveal their ultimate aim however...to take over Earth and enslave its population...

V

...Your mission as resistance leader Michael Donovan is to seek and destroy their Mother Ship using all the skills and weaponry at your command.

All-action, multi-level Arcade game for your Spectrum & Commodore.

SPECTRUM 48K
£7·95

COMMODORE 64
£8·95

SPECTRUM 48K



AMSTRAD



ocean

V (Spectrum 48K, C64, Amstrad) Advert first appeared in *Crash* magazine, April 1986


eMag

ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY THOUGH, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

PLAYSTATION2

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Sony

UK LAUNCH DATE
24 November 2000

MEDIA
4.75-inch DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£169.99

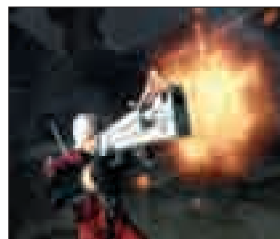
The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. With support across the board from third-party developers, a built-in DVD player and backward compatibility with older PSone games, it's the most popular videogame console available today.



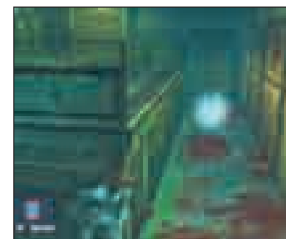
TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Ico	SCEE	In-House
2	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
3	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical
4	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Neversoft
5	Pro Evolution Soccer 2	Konami	In-House
6	Burnout 2	Acclaim	Criterion
7	Devil May Cry	Capcom	In-House
8	Rez	SEGA	UGA
9	Colin McRae Rally 3	Codemasters	In-House
10	Kingdom Hearts	SCEE	Squaresoft
11	Final Fantasy X	SCEE	Squaresoft
12	Wild Arms 3	Ubi Soft	Media Vision
13	Capcom VS SNK 2	Capcom	In-House
14	Ape Escape 2	Sony	In-House
15	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive
16	Project Zero	Wanadoo	Tecmo
17	Sky Odyssey	Sony	Cross
18	The Getaway	SCEE	Team Soho
19	Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance	Midway	In-House
20	Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	Konami	In-House

VIEWPOINT
DEVIL MAY CRY
With the sequel proving itself to be not nearly as much fun as the first game, we find ourselves turning to the original *Devil May Cry* for our demon-slaughtering needs. The PAL conversion might not be amazing, but it's still a damn fine game.



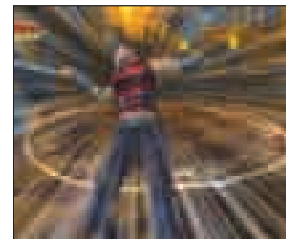
VIEWPOINT
METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE
Okay, so maybe you've had your fill of Solid Snake and his sneaking, stealthy, silent ways – but you can't deny that *MGS2: Substance* is the definitive version of the *MGS* saga. We hope they hurry up with a proper sequel…



VIEWPOINT
WILD ARMS 3
The trend for bringing old-school franchises bang up to date continues with SEGA's seminal ninja-'em-up. Packed full of familiar references, it still manages to inject some new life into the ageing series with some flashy effects and interesting gameplay.



VIEWPOINT
PRIMAL
Hey, look – a game that hasn't made it into our 'Must Have' listings. Why? Because it's not very good, despite the fact that Sony are pushing it to the hilt. It's a real disappointment seeing as it's been in development for so long – but don't buy it. Really, just don't.









GAMECUBE

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Nintendo

UK LAUNCH DATE
3 May 2002

MEDIA
3-inch Optical Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£129.99

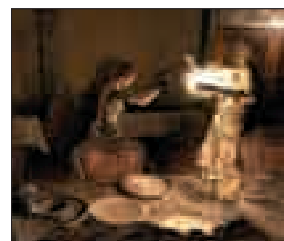
Although it's the cheapest machine on the market, Nintendo's newest console shouldn't be underestimated. The firm's long-established experience in games means that the GameCube can expect to see many quality first- and third-party games in the future. Primarily a games machine, the GameCube has no DVD function.



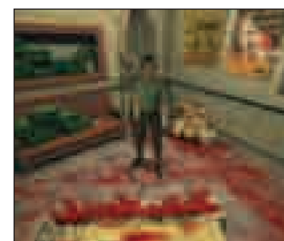
TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

No.	Title		Publisher	Developer
1	Metroid Prime		Nintendo	In-House
2	Winning Eleven 6: Final Evolution	IMPORT	Konami	In-House
3	Super Monkey Ball 2		SEGA	Amusement Vision
4	Animal Crossing	IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House
5	TimeSplitters 2		Eidos	Free Radical
6	Skies Of Arcadia: Legends	IMPORT	SEGA	Overworks
7	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4		Activision	Neversoft
8	Ikaruga	IMPORT	Treasure	In-House
9	Super Mario Sunshine		Nintendo	In-House
10	Eternal Darkness		Nintendo	Silicon Knights
11	NBA Street 2		Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG
12	Resident Evil		Capcom	In-House
13	Resident Evil Zero		Capcom	In-House
14	Mario Party 4		Nintendo	Hudson
15	StarFox Adventures		Nintendo	Rare
16	Star Wars: Rogue Leader		Activision	Factor 5
17	Bomberman Generation		Majesco	Hudson
18	Aggressive Inline		Acclaim	Z-Axis
19	Doshin The Giant		Nintendo	In-House
20	Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance		Midway	In-House

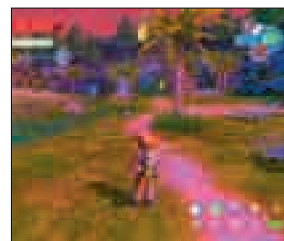
VIEWPOINT
RESIDENT EVIL ZERO
It might not be quite as good as the remake of the original but if it's a totally new *RE* game you're after, you really can't go wrong with this rather tasty prequel. At least now we know how it all happened, and that zombies aren't the only things to be scared of.



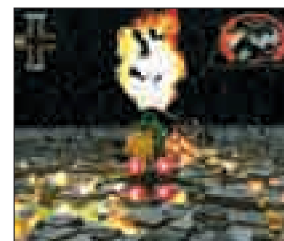
VIEWPOINT
ETERNAL DARKNESS
So, is it really scarier than anything the *Resident Evil* series has to offer? Well, that depends on what scares you. It's certainly not as high on the jump factor but for back-of-your-neck psychological chills, this is a doozy. In fact, only *Project Zero* manages to best it.



VIEWPOINT
STARFOX ADVENTURES
No, it's not as good as everyone hoped, and for that we can only lament the fact that it was the last thing Rare ever did for Nintendo. However, it's still worth playing through at least once – if only for the fact that it's very gorgeous and enjoyable the first time around.



VIEWPOINT
STAR WARS: ROGUE LEADER
Still ranking up there as one of our top twenty GameCube games ever, it's a game that came out nearly a year ago… scary. *Rogue Leader* is easily one of the best *Star Wars* games around now – if you haven't got it, why not?



ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY THOUGH, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

XBOX

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Microsoft

UK LAUNCH DATE
13 March 2002

MEDIA
4.75-inch DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£159.99

Despite a slow start, the Xbox is swiftly becoming one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded upon the built-in hard drive, broadband support and DVD player. However, the Xbox is far more accessible to the casual gamer than most PCs.

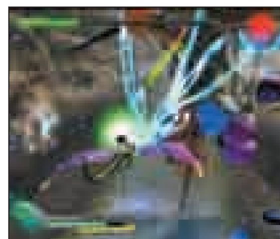


TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Halo	Microsoft	Bungie
2	Panzer Dragoon Orta	SEGA	Smilebit
3	Jet Set Radio Future	SEGA	Smilebit
4	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical
5	Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	In-House
6	Colin McRae Rally 3	CodeMasters	In-House
7	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Neversoft
8	Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo
9	Project Gotham Racing	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations
10	Aggressive Inline	Acclaim	Z-Axis
11	Dead Or Alive 3	Microsoft	Tecmo
12	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive
13	Quantum Redshift	Microsoft	Curly Monsters
14	Dead Or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball	Microsoft	Tecmo
15	Buffy The Vampire Slayer	EA	In-House
16	Phantom Crash	Phantagram	In-House
17	Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance	Midway	In-House
18	World Racing	TDK Mediactive	Synetic
19	Blinx: The Time Sweeper	Microsoft	Artoon
20	Toejam & Earl III: Mission To Earth IMPORT	SEGA	TJ&E Productions

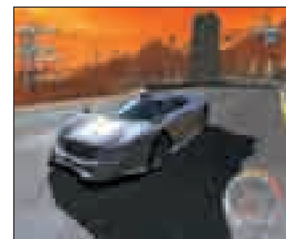
VIEWPOINT
PANZER DRAGOON ORTA

Games based on old franchises seem to be appearing out of the woodwork at the moment, but none of them are as good as SEGA's update of its Saturn classic. Pure shoot-'em-up action at its very finest, you lucky people.



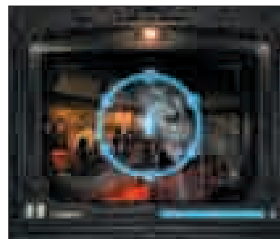
VIEWPOINT
WORLD RACING

Don't you just hate it when that happens? Thanks to the unfortunate demise of Rage, last month's placing for *Lamborghini* falls by the wayside, leaving *World Racing* as the winner by default – surely the two sweetest words in the English language?



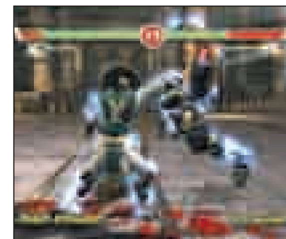
VIEWPOINT
PROJECT ZERO

If you're a regular reader, you'll know that we're fans of this rather knee-trembling adventure – mainly because it's scarier than all the *Resident Evil* games put together. And now it's out on the Xbox as well so if you're looking to soil your underpants, this is for you.

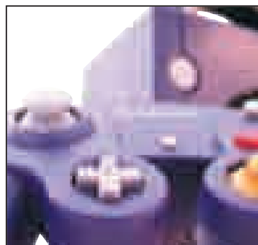


VIEWPOINT
MORTAL KOMBAT: DEADLY ALLIANCE

While not exactly the be-all and end-all of beat-'em-ups, *MK:DA* is definitely the best that the *Mortal Kombat* series has to offer at the moment. Well worth picking up if you're a fan, or renting if you just fancy a bit of hack 'n slash action.













GBA

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Nintendo

UK LAUNCH DATE
22 June 2001

MEDIA
Flash Cartridge

CURRENT PRICE
£69.99



Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The new SP model is due out on 28 March.

TOP TEN MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Metroid Fusion	Nintendo	In-House
2	Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe	Wanadoo	Crawfish
3	Castlevania: Harmony Of Dissonance	Konami	In-House
4	Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
5	Golden Sun	Nintendo	Camelot
6	Advance Wars	Nintendo	In-House
7	Street Fighter Alpha 3	Ubi Soft	Crawfish
8	Tactics Ogre IMPORT	Nintendo	Atlus
9	Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
10	Sonic Advance	SEGA	Sonic Team

VIEWPOINT
ZELDA: LINK TO THE PAST / FOUR SWORDS
Four-player *Zelda*? Damn right – exactly what this otherwise fairly straightforward SNES port needs to make it a must-have purchase.



VIEWPOINT
METROID FUSION
The perfect accompaniment to *Metroid Prime* or an excellent game in its own right – either way, there's really no excuse for not owning Samus's mini adventure.



PC

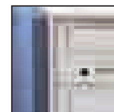
DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
N/A

UK LAUNCH DATE
N/A

MEDIA
4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£variable

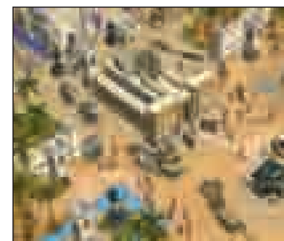


While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it is perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics.

TOP TEN MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Grand Theft Auto 3	Take 2	Rockstar
2	Unreal Tournament 2003	Infogrames	Digital Extremes
3	Championship Manager 01/02	Eidos	Sports Interactive
4	Operation: Flashpoint	Codemasters	In-House
5	Age Of Mythology	Microsoft	Ensemble Studios
6	Half-Life	Vivendi	Valve Software
7	The Sims	EA	Maxis
8	Civilization III	Infogrames	Firaxis
9	Fallout 2	Virgin Interactive	Interplay
10	Sam And Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts

VIEWPOINT
AGE OF MYTHOLOGY
Ever wanted to be your own god without Mr Molyneux's help? Then this is the just the thing – all the little people you'll ever want, without even a mention of *Populous*. Great.



VIEWPOINT
CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 01/02
With the next instalment of the series slipping once more into April, we've had to make do with the last version instead.



PERIPHERALS

THEY MAY NOT BE EVERYONE'S CUP OF TEA, BUT EACH CONSOLE HAS ITS OWN MUST-HAVE PERIPHERALS – THOSE LITTLE EXTRAS THAT MAKE THE GAMING EXPERIENCE ALL THE MORE PLEASURABLE. CAN YOU KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF THEM?

G-CON 2 LIGHTGUN

DETAILS

CONSOLE
PlayStation2

FROM
Sony

CURRENT PRICE
£19.99

AVAILABLE
Now

Yes, we too remember the original G-Con lightgun that Namco came up with all those years ago on the PSone – a horribly clunky piece of grey plastic with buttons in the most stupid of places. All right, so maybe it wasn't that bad but still, it wasn't exactly the easiest piece of kit to use simply because it was just so damn big. Thankfully though, the arrival of *Time Crisis 2* on the PS2 ushered in a new era of lightgun action and lo, the G-Con 2 was born. Sleeker, prettier and easier to hold than its mutant of an elder brother, the G-Con 2 has the added advantage of being backward compatible, having buttons in perfectly natural positions (around the trigger guard and on the bottom of the butt) and working through a USB connection rather than the usual composite input. The result? A lightgun that manages to force its way up onto the 'must-have' peripherals list – if you can find it, that is.



XBOX LIVE STARTER KIT

DETAILS

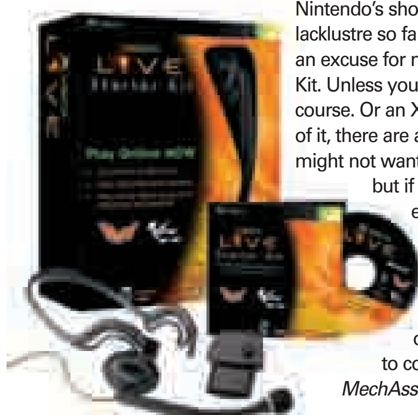
CONSOLE
Xbox

FROM
Microsoft

CURRENT PRICE
£49.99

AVAILABLE
Now

So, 14 March has been and gone… how was it for you? Good? Same for us – especially because it means we can now finally get online with our Xbox Live kits that we've had for absolutely ages and play against real people, rather than the same old Beta testers time and time again. With Xbox Live now firmly established as the best way of getting online with your games console at the moment (mainly because Sony and Nintendo's showing has been rather lacklustre so far), there really isn't much of an excuse for not getting yourself a Starter Kit. Unless you haven't got broadband, of course. Or an Xbox. In fact, come to think of it, there are a few reasons why you might not want to get your hands on one; but if you do happen to be lucky enough to get past those stumbling blocks then you really should be thinking about getting yourself online right about… now. If only because we're waiting to completely kick your arse at *MechAssault*. Really.



SKY GAMEPADS

DETAILS

CONSOLE
N/A

FROM
Sky

CURRENT PRICE
£24.99 (2-player pack)
£19.99 (1-player pack)
£14.99 (extra pad)

AVAILABLE
Now

Okay, so we have to admit that the word 'essential' means something totally different in this case. The Sky Gamepads aren't exactly a must-have peripheral – they're only a necessity if you want to play games through Sky Gamestar. However, with interactive gaming supposedly being the next wave of technology, we felt we had to include them this month – and besides, they're rather nifty as well. The only downside is that Gamestar is pay-per-play; not exactly ideal when you're already paying a £15+ a month subscription fee for the TV…



FREELOADER

DETAILS

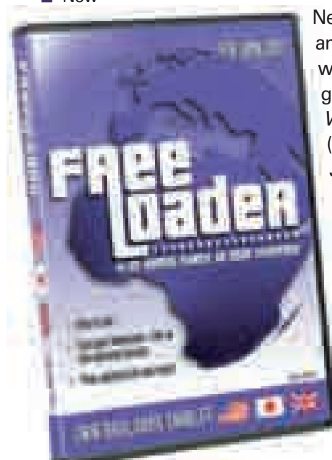
CONSOLE
GameCube

FROM
Datel

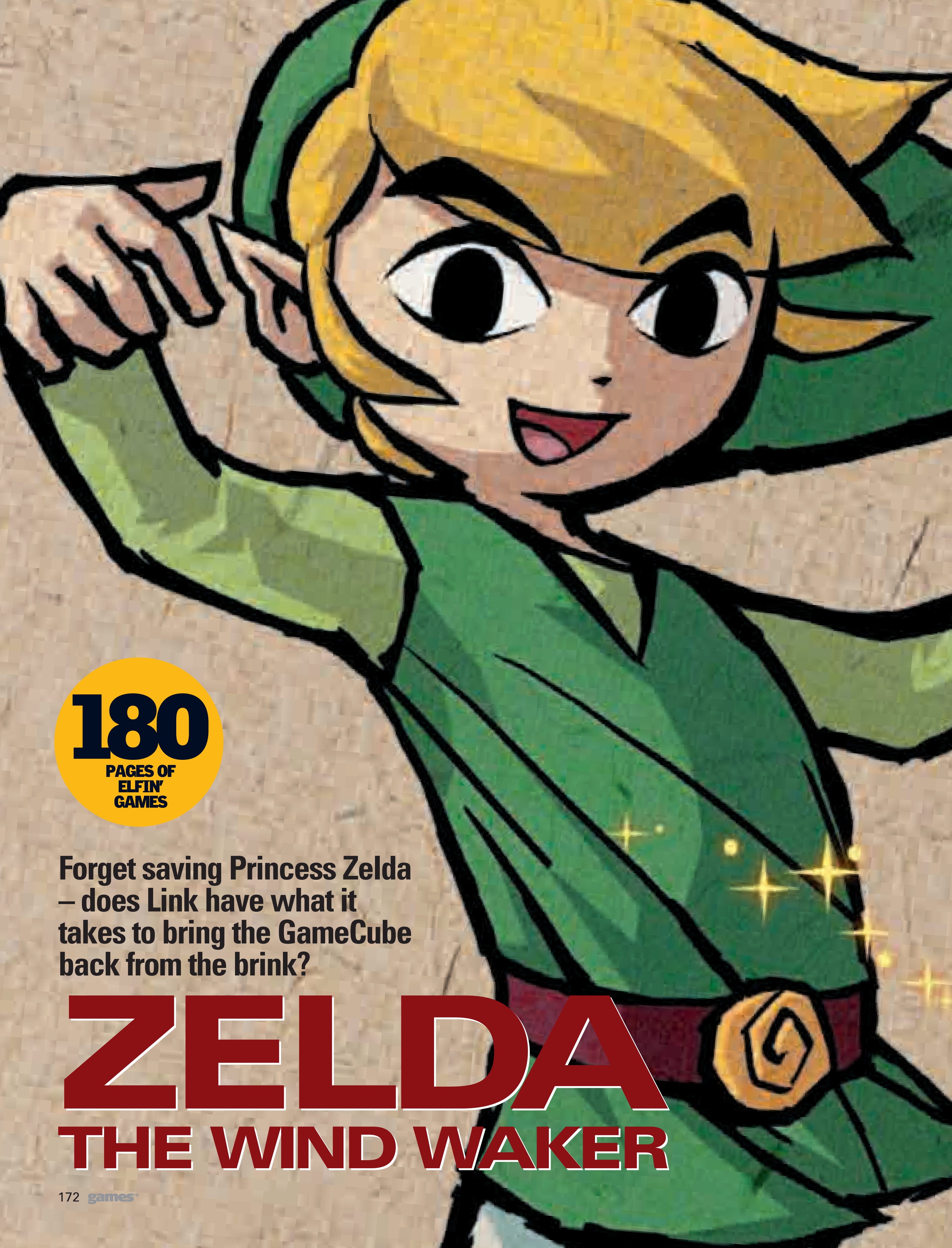
CURRENT PRICE
£19.99

AVAILABLE
Now

Considering it's a third-party peripheral that shouldn't by rights even exist, the Freeloader has managed to generate a vast amount of interest and intrigue. Will it ever come out? Is it going to work in the way it should? Does it even exist? Well, in all three instances, the answer is yes; quite an achievement for Datel, considering that cracking the security of consoles and computers isn't exactly something you'd want to boast about. Nevertheless, the Freeloader is here and that means any GameCube owner wanting to import US and Japanese games like *Zelda: The Wind Waker*, *Winning Eleven 6* or *Kinniku Man 2* (hey, gotta love those bizarre Japanese anime wrestling games) and play them on their PAL machines can now do so without fear of the game not working. Even better though, those of you with import GameCubes can now pick up older UK games on the cheap and run them just fine – better than a slap in the face, eh?




eMag



180 PAGES OF ELFIN' GAMES

Forget saving Princess Zelda – does Link have what it takes to bring the GameCube back from the brink?

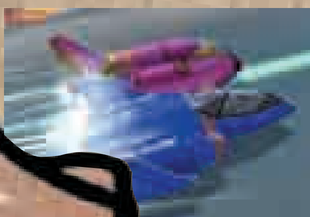
ZELDA
THE WIND WAKER

NEXT MONTH IN games™

See? If you thought we couldn't keep the magazine at a sturdy 180 pages every month, help yourself to a serving of word pie – you deserve it. Of course, we'll have even more goodness next issue…

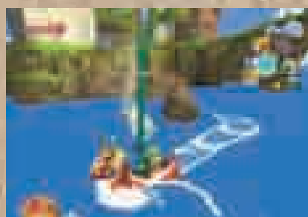
MORE… PREVIEWS

Okay, so we'll admit that as we move towards the middle of the year, things are going a little quiet. However, there's still enough quality material waiting in the wings to be given a good going over.



MORE… REVIEWS

April and May are important months for some publishers, with several big games being released – check back next month for complete reviews of titles like *ZOE2*, *ISS3* and something called… *Zelda*?



MORE… FEATURES

Can you believe some people actually make a living playing games who aren't journalists or games testers? Well, they do. We go undercover and look into the world of the professional games player.



INCLUDING

And still it goes on:

MORE… RETRO

A long, long time ago…

MORE… NEWS

Hot off the gaming presses

MORE… INTERVIEWS

Industry types who have more than enough to say

Of course, that's only the tip of issue 5's iceberg – there's a whole lot more to come on top of that. And remember; if you liked this issue, tell your friends. If you didn't… well, tell your friends anyway. You never know, they might have better taste than you.

ON SALE 24 APRIL 03

CONTACT
ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF gamesTM

THIS MONTH YOU'RE ALL HET UP ABOUT ONLINE GAMING, IN-GAME STORYLINES AND WHETHER 'CASUAL GAMERS' ARE GOOD FOR THE INDUSTRY

Love letters, begging letters, poison-pen letters… we ignored all of those because we're only interested in hearing what you lot have got to say about the gaming issues of the day. We even threw away that ransom note containing one of the editor's ears because, well, it just wasn't 'gamey' enough. You get the picture.

MAKING CONTACT

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™; the traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

games™
Paragon Publishing Ltd
Paragon House
St Peter's Road
Bournemouth
BH1 2JS

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the Internet. Email us at this address: gamestm@paragon.co.uk

Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum? Here you should be shielded from multiple spams and infantile remarks. Access to the site has been password protected and only those of you who have bought this issue of **games**™ will be able to get onto the site – and if you have bought this magazine then you're not the sort to be abusive and childish, are you? Follow these quick steps to getting on the **games**™ forum and enjoy hassle-free chatting with those of us who share a passion for gaming.

Step One:
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

Step Two:
Type the following into the Net browser window: www.totalgames.net/forum/
This will give you read-only access to the forum. To get in on the fun, you'll have to register – you can do that by clicking on the 'Register' icon at the top of the page. Fill in your details, choose a name and then wait for a password to be emailed to you (which will arrive in no time).

Step Three:
Once registered, click on the **games**™ forum icon. You'll need the password, and that's '**Guinness**'. Then a whole world of sophisticated wit and games chat will be yours. It says here.

CAN YOU TELL me what this hype about online gaming is all about? The industry is going mad over it and shelling out a lot of money to get it launched. But is there really enough enthusiasm to get it off the ground?

It failed on the Dreamcast even before the machine itself went down, and after asking around at school I didn't find anyone who was excited about it or had even contemplated going online. So is Europe ready for online gaming or will it suffer the virtual reality fate?
R. Goodway

games™: Online gaming has been hugely popular for years on the PC but, as you rightly point out, it's been different for consoles. The Dreamcast was the first to have a stab at online gaming and there was plenty of interest in what SEGA was trying to achieve. Sadly, because the console never took off, online gaming on consoles disappeared for a while. But Microsoft and Sony's efforts to promote online gaming coupled with ever more affordable broadband connections, means there's very little chance it'll fail.

SINCE GAMECUBE WAS released we have seen a move from Xbox and PS2 that may change the games industry for sure – the move to online gaming. Now this is not at all bad, as it's very enjoyable. I have experienced this from playing *Phantasy Star Online* and racking up huge bills…

But my main concern about this is that developers may try to put online options in their games, thereby making lots of people annoyed as they cannot complete the game if they can't get online. This scares me as I can barely afford to buy games and I don't want to be spending a fortune on the online part of the game. But I feel like I am being pushed towards this option.

My friends say it won't happen because it's taken ages for online gaming to get this far. But I'm afraid that by the time PS3 and Xbox2 arrive we will see a lot more online gaming which will leave a lot of people with no money little opportunity to experience such games.
Lee Sanders

games™: Think of online gaming as an addition to your gaming experience and not something that will replace it. Sure, some brave developers will make games that will be almost exclusively online, but most will use broadband to offer gamers extra levels or give them the opportunity to play against others. But offline gaming will remain the norm, simply because of the expense and the fact that online gaming can never replace the joys of the single-player experience or even offline multiplayer gaming.

IT IS CLEAR that it's the casual gamer that's keeping the games industry alive. If it wasn't for the casual gamers buying *FIFA* or *Tony Hawk's*, EA wouldn't have the money for games like *Medal Of Honor: Frontline*.

So although to a certain extent they are the bane of the gaming society, casual gamers are also the people keeping the console market so competitive. So next time you feel like burning that person you see buying *Lord Of The Rings: The Two Towers* remember that it's another £40 in the bank to make new quality games.
Matt Newell

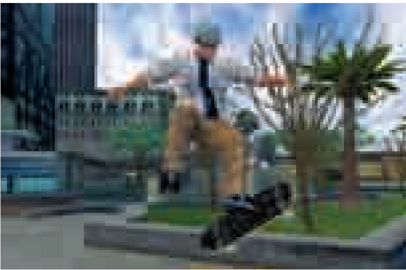
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Is *Tony Hawk's* subsidising less mainstream games? Or is it ruining everything?

games™: These 'casual' and 'hard-core' labels shouldn't be used as a hard and fast rule – this kind of segregation can only ever be a bad thing. All that really matters is that people play videogames and enjoy them, and that developers can shift enough units to continue making games.

☐ **I KNOW A** lot of people could be described as 'casual' gamers – they buy stuff like *The Getaway*, *ISS*, *GTA*... All good games, but nothing that creative or off the wall, which is what I prefer.

I've got nothing at all against someone who enjoys videogames every now and then – not everyone wants to spend endless hours completing *Final Fantasy*, you might have actually have a life or something. What worries me is that in an industry that seems to be existing hand to mouth financially (at least here in the West), are the conservative tastes of the people that pay the publishers' and developers' bills, the casual gamers, going to kill originality in games? Or is there some way to sustain pockets of originality, as small independent companies do in film?

There's a world of possibilities in videogames that remains unexplored as developers are hamstrung by an industry that can only afford to pander to mass tastes, and it's time people started striking out on their own. The popularity of retrogaming shows that you don't have to have a gigantic budget and the latest developer tools to make a game that will hold people's interest.

Take a look at www.pompom.org.uk – two guys coding games from home, knocking them out at £15 quid a pop over the Internet and getting rave reviews – there's an example of what the industry needs! Don't get me wrong, I'd be bitterly disappointed if I didn't have my *Tekkens*, *Metroids* and *MGS*s any more and had to content myself with 2D retro stylings, but the sort of pioneer spirit PomPom have shown could be just the thing to make videogames come of age.

Of course this is all very easy for someone who doesn't make a living from the games industry to say, but isn't it time for a few mavericks to start taking some chances?

Jamie Hancock

games™: So, is it our fault for having 'conservative' taste? Or should the developers take more risks? Let us know what you think.

☐ **WELL IT'S FINALLY HAPPENED** – gaming has turned into the interactive version of a poorly made cheesy American teen movie. Can't see what I mean? Allow me to explain…

If you watch more than one teen movie it becomes apparent that they all seem to follow the same storyboard, and the same is happening with games – you can see that



"THERE'S A WORLD OF POSSIBILITIES IN GAMES THAT REMAINS UNEXPLORED AS DEVELOPERS ARE HAMSTRUNG BY AN INDUSTRY THAT CAN ONLY AFFORD TO PANDER TO MASS TASTES"

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

TEXT LIFE...

☐ How about a RETRO STUFF FOR SALE area in the Retro section.
Actually, that's not a bad idea. We'll look into it.

☐ Please please couldf u help me? I am trying to get a copy of *Bubble Bobble* on the Playstaton1 but not Hun anu luck . Please Help.
You could try eBay. Short of that, might we suggest that you treat yourself to a GBSP (you know you want to) and buy *Bubble Bobble: Old And New*.

☐ Cheers guys, because of your mag I will be waiting a few months to get a GBA SP rather than buying a GBA.
Just doing our job…

☐ What has happened to Gamecube's Freeloader?
It's on the shelves now.

☐ I had and still have a Kempston joystick interface for the speccy but it never worked!
And you thought that the longer you kept it the more chance there was that it would work? Well, does it?

☐ The campaign for a *Dizzy* anthology starts today. Make it happen **games**™ !
As with many old gaming heroes, we reckon it'd be quite popular.

☐ What's happened to *Tiger Woods 2003* on the Xbox? It seems to have disappeared from the shops and my missus is keen to play it.
We suspect that this quality title has sold rather more than EA expected – it certainly deserved to.

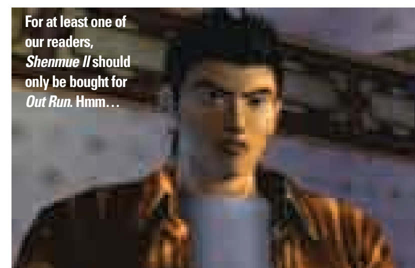
☐ Can I get hold of your first issue? Coz the way this mag is going it's going to be worth a bit in a few years.
You could try our subs department on (01202) 200200…

☐ I am only buying *Shenmue II* so I can play *Outrun*. The *Shenmue* series is boring.
We think you're missing the point. But *Out Run* is pretty cool…

☐ Was there ever a game on the Sega Saturn called *Keio Flying Squadron 2*? I am sure that it existed but my mates think I made it up. It was a side scrolling 2D shooter with a bunny girl as the main character. Please prove them that I am not insane.
You are correct, such a game did exist. Now go out and pull faces at your thicky mates.



Bedroom developers still exist, as this site proves


For at least one of our readers, *Shenmue II* should only be bought for *Out Run*. Hmm…

there's a pattern. I'm not going to single out any games in particular but many are guilty. Not wanting to develop their own ideas they simply plug into a proven area and leech off it. What we are left with are games that lack any sense of care and magic, something that leaves you so uninspired you could cry. Even on the most simple elements that could have improved them, the developers have chosen to simply churn out any old trash.

Visual flare and gameplay innovation have been thrown out along with numerous other things and what we are left with is not even a game. Sorry, I'll have to mention one – *Minority Report*. It may not follow the same plot of games like it, but it follows the same standards. This unwillingness of developers to deliver is getting worse and I would be interested to hear your views on the subject.
James Temperton

games™: Don't get us wrong, we love innovative games as much as the next gaming nut, but when you have to spend millions developing a game you want to make sure as many people buy it as possible – and the kinds of games that you speak of simply aren't selling. So, because gamers are buying tried-and-tested games or sequels, developers have to make choices about where best to put their efforts. You can't blame 'em for that, can you?

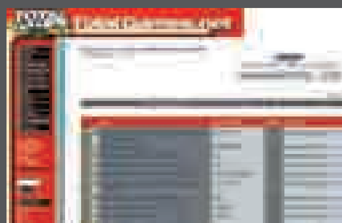
☐ **GREAT MAG, A** good mature look at gaming that takes more than 20 minutes to read, unlike most mags. Are you going to do an article on game music and specifically game music remixes? The games music remix scene on the net is very strong, specifically for the Commodore 64. Chris Abbott has a great site called www.c64audio.com. Remember the old game *Lazy Jones* that was used as music in the *Zombie Nation* track? The author of the music received £40,000 in royalties!

I'm sure you could come up with an interesting article on updates and remixes of classic games music. I suggest you download a few tracks by Instant Remedy or the Soundwavers (*Comic Bakery* springs to mind) – you may be surprised how catchy these new versions of old tunes are. Also, a feature on some of the Back In Time events that Chris Abbott organises at various nightclubs would be interesting – loads of people dancing to computer game remixes!
George Cook

games™: Sounds good (sorry…) – it's something that we'll certainly look into in the future.

☐ **AS THE DAYS** pass, more details are being unveiled about the next generation of games consoles. Microsoft and Sony are already bragging about how the successors to their current machines will be the most powerful and versatile consoles yet.

This may well be true, but wouldn't constant talk of the new machines theoretically ruin the games that are to be released for the next-gen consoles? The aforementioned companies would be keen to encourage developers to start thinking about the games that they could produce for their new consoles. If this was the case, then surely developers would feel less obliged to take full advantage of a current machine when they know that a more powerful version is just around the corner?



FROM THE FORUM

What do today's gamers think about piracy? Is it fair game or foul play?

"GAMING HAS FINALLY TURNED INTO THE INTERACTIVE VERSION OF A POORLY MADE CHEESY AMERICAN TEEN MOVIE"

Basically, will the release schedule of next year be full of lacklustre games, simply because developers would rather wait to make something 'better' on an improved console?
Ben Haddock

games™: This is very unlikely. Take the PSone, for example. Developers continued to develop for it long after the more powerful Dreamcast was released (heck, there's still a market today for PSone games). Why? Because there was money to be made thanks to a large installed user base. New technology will always be around the corner but it takes time (and numerous price reductions) before a new console becomes truly mass market. As such, developers will always choose to develop software for the most popular consoles to ensure that they make the most money. As such, you can be sure that developers will continue to push current hardware rather than wait for the 'next big thing'.

☐ **FREELOADER FINALLY ARRIVING** for the GameCube is, for me, the most exciting news the GC has had for a long time. Most people would agree that Nintendo appear to treat Europe as a bit of an afterthought. But being able to play Japanese and US releases (some of which never make it to Europe or are badly converted to PAL) opens up a whole load of new opportunities without having the pain of chipping and modding, leaving the warranty intact. I'm looking forward to *Prime*, *Zelda*, *Ikaruga* and *Winning Eleven 6: Final Evolution* – and that's just for starters.

I believe Nintendo (plus Sony and Microsoft) should embrace this technology, as they have with the Game Boy. Game Boys have always been multi-region and this has not adversely affected sales or regional markets that I am aware of.

I know the main problem behind this in the past has been due to configuration differences (i.e. PAL/NTSC) but all modern TVs perform both without problems, and hopefully Freeloader can prove that the software market can open up – it has the possibility of changing the way games are published and distributed.

The market has the potential to shift its focus to multi-region and I can only see benefits. Conversion costs could be reduced and companies would be able to distribute their games from anywhere in the world knowing that the game they produce could go global with the minimum of changes.

I know it will never replace the existing set-up, and language differences will remain, but it could provide an interesting parallel market – especially for the hard-core gamer.
David Howlett

games™: The same could be said of DVDs, and even though many DVD players can now play discs from all regions, how many people take advantage of that ability? It might be great – especially with Nintendo games – to play imported games without the hassle of invalidating your console, but many people's jobs in the games industry rely on UK-only sales, and if everyone bought a US copy of *Metroid* or *Zelda* we might end up without a UK or European branch of Nintendo which, no matter your view of Nintendo, can only be a bad thing. As ever, we'd like to hear what you think about this.



☐ **Hong Kong Phooey**
Posted 12 February 2003 10:54 AM
When I had my Spectrum 48K, piracy was common at my school. Someone would buy a new game and before you knew it, the whole class had a copy. Because I was young and everyone was doing it, I thought nothing of it. I did buy original games like *Knight Lore* and *Underwurlde*, but the vast majority of my games came on blank C90 tapes. This was due to the fact that I had very little money, so 'copies' were the only way I could play a lot of games.

Fast forward to the PlayStation era. Nowadays, I wouldn't dream of buying a copied game and I frown upon people who do. Maybe it's because I have 'money' now, so I can afford to buy a few games a month. However, the children at school buying the pirate copies are only doing what I did when I was their age. Thoughts?

☐ **fluffyduck**
Posted 12 February 2003 07:49 PM
I'll resort to shadier methods of obtaining games if I won't be able to nip down to the shop and get the original. Take *Daytona USA* on the Dreamcast, for instance – I downloaded the US version and even emailed SEGA telling them I was, because the PAL version was to have online play pulled. Not that my actions made the slightest bit of difference to the low sales figures anyway.

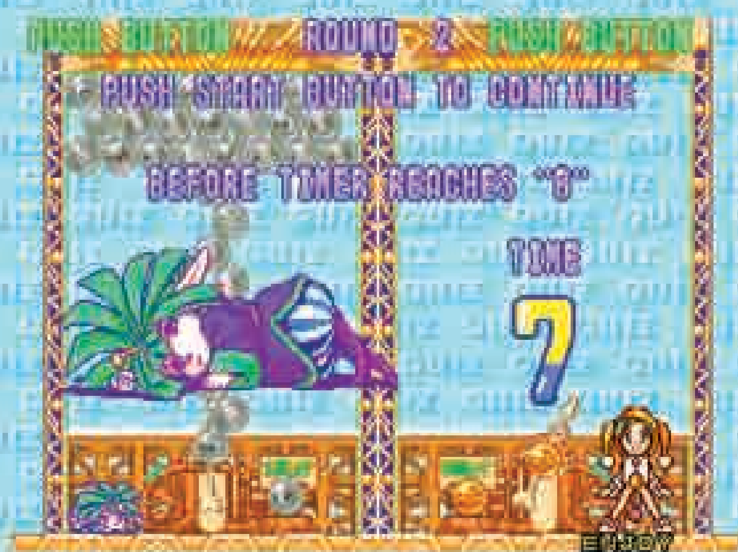
☐ **jmoid**
Posted 12 February 2003 08:55 PM
Buying pirate games is nothing to be proud of, but the fact is a lot of the time they're games that you'd pay £5 for but not £35. I'm ignorant of the exact economics involved but it does seem to me that games are overpriced. I can think of plenty of games that I'd buy if they were £20, but I can only afford so many that cost £40. The price of games puts them out of the reach of many people, so you can't blame anyone for being tempted if someone offers them a copy for a fiver.

☐ **Hong Kong Phooey**
Posted 13 February 2003 09:41 AM
If the price of games was reduced, would this cut down on piracy? Even if games retailed at £20, I suspect that piracy would continue, although sales of games would go up.

☐ **boxcarboy**
Posted 18 February 2003 01:03 PM
I wouldn't buy a pirated game, purely because the quality is likely to be poor. But I don't have any sympathy for the games companies – if they released games universally then it would cut out most piracy.

☐ **Sobtanian**
Posted 18 February 2003 11:52 PM
If all the games publishers in the world were to offer their games for free, and give you a tenner on top of each copy you take, people would still be cracking the hardware and ripping the games. It's a spirit that runs between the pirate high society. They even ripped the charity £5 *Toy Racer* on Dreamcast for God's sake!

☐ **Android18a**
Posted 19 February 2003 07:15 AM
Piracy is dumb. I wouldn't buy a pirated game at all, ever. Not least because you can't take it to GAME and get a part-exchange on it. I'd only ever buy a normal, real, full-price game. If I wouldn't pay £40 for it, I wouldn't buy it for a fiver either.



games™

24/04/03